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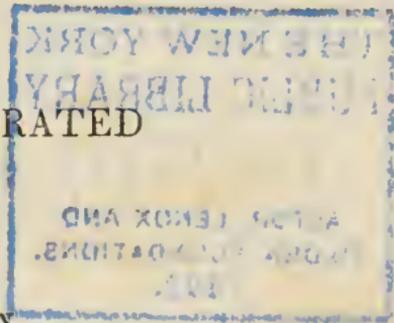
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THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS,

ILLUSTRATED



IN

# SIX SERMONS.

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BY JAMES WOOD.

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LONDON, 1722.



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## PREFACE.

THE publishers of these Sermons feel much confidence in offering them to the Christian community. Of the author they have no other knowledge, than is given on the title page, excepting, that it appears from the preface to the London edition, that the Sermons were preached at the king's Weigh-house, to the people under the pastoral care of the Rev. Mr. Reynolds. We are not surprised, that the author was solicited to furnish a copy for the press. Though not distinguished for those flashes of imagination and explosions of feeling, which dazzle and astonish, they will be found to be replete with views and illustrations, both striking and felicitous. The portraiture, which is given of the character of those, who are true followers of Christ, and of those who merely wear the livery of discipleship, is drawn with a masterly hand. His delineation of the feelings and motives of "mere professors," and of true Christians, furnishes satisfactory evidence, that he well understood the workings of the human heart, before and after it has experienced the renewing operations of the Holy Spirit.

From these remarks it would naturally be inferred, that these Sermons on the parable of the ten virgins, are *practical*. This characteristic is visible on every page. It is a prominent excellence. No professor of religion can rise from the perusal of these Sermons, without feeling, that instruction and encouragement, caution and warning, have been applied to his daily conduct, and have also been carried into the most secret places,—into the very sanctuary of his bosom.

It would also be inferred from what has been said, that these Sermons are *evangelical*. They are strictly so. They seem to have come from a mind, which had been "instructed unto the kingdom of heaven," and from a heart, which had received "an unction from the Holy One."

At a day like the present, when there is reason to fear, that many take upon themselves the mere exterior or the mere name of a Christian, we feel persuaded, that a wide circulation of these Sermons would be a great blessing to the cause of pure and undefiled religion. Although written more than a hundred years since, they are not in the least deficient in pertinency of application to all who have named the name of Christ, in our own time and in our own land. It appears to have been the object of the author, to give a truly Scriptural view of the *morality*, which may be taken as evidence of "the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." In doing this, he has stripped off the disguises of hypocrisy, and laid bare the corruption and uncleanness, which often lie concealed beneath a covering of plausible professions of piety.

The present age in New England, has been blessed with many revivals of religion. For these we have great reason for gratitude. Under the excitement of animal feelings, however, it often happens, that many imagine themselves to have received a vital renovation of their moral affections, and perhaps continue for many months or even years, to cherish a hope of heaven, until at last, it is too painfully manifest, that they are still "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel." A large proportion of those, who are usually affected by revivals, are in the morning of life. They are young in every thing, which relates to the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the heart. They need a guide to self-examination. They need instruction from those who have had experience in the divine life. They need a map of the country through which the pilgrims must travel, before they reach the prom-

ised land.—Whatever will render them assistance in respect to any of the great points of practical religion, urges a claim upon their patronage. To the young, as well as the old, therefore, in the profession of the gospel, these Sermons may be earnestly recommended, as worthy of serious and prayerful attention.

It surely is not easy to exaggerate the importance of a true Christian profession. We are exposed to errors within and without. We dwell in a world of temptation. While we have “a name to live,” we may be “dead in trespasses and sins.” We may go regularly to the sacramental table, and partake of the emblems of our Saviour’s sufferings and death,—while we are only aggravating the guilt of impenitence, and preparing ourselves for a heavier condemnation and a more withering curse, at the dread tribunal of the last day. What language can describe the agony of those, unto whom the Lord shall say,—“*I never knew you; DEPART from me, ye workers of iniquity!*”—On the contrary, what emotions of rapture shall inspire the anthems of those, to whom he shall address the salutation,—“Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom, prepared for *you*, from the foundation of the world!”

It is possible, that in remarking upon the Sermons, which follow, our feelings may have betrayed us into terms of unwarranted encomium. We would not excite expectations of any thing magnificent or unparalleled. But we feel assured, that this little volume possesses a large share of sterling excellence, and that its merits cannot fail to be appreciated by all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, and who wish to be “always ready to give an answer to every man, that asketh the reason of the hope that is in them, with meekness and fear.”

To these observations, we have thought it would not be uninteresting, to subjoin a brief analysis or outline of the author’s illustration of the interesting parable, which is the theme of his discourses.

After some explanatory remarks, he proceeds to

specify five general propositions. (See Sermon I. p. 17.)

The principal object of the first Sermon is, to illustrate the proposition—“*That among such as make a profession of Christianity, many are mere professors.*”

1. Some make a profession from the influence of *education.*

2. Some from the influence, of *an awakened conscience.*

3. Some from a regard to *reputation.*

4. Some from a regard to *secular advantage.*

5. Some from a desire to *conceal their wickedness.*

These are represented by the *foolish virgins.* Their *folly* is manifest, because

1. They practically prefer living under the *displeasure*, to living under the *favor* of God.

2. They practically prefer *dying accursed*, to *dying in the Lord.*

3. They prefer the agonies of hell to the joys of heaven.

Practical reflections.

1. We ought not to draw conclusions to the prejudice of religion, from the miscarriages of such as profess it.

2. We ought to guard against an empty profession of Christianity.

3. The Christian should bless God, for his goodness in making him a true believer.

In the second Sermon, the author shows, “*That the truth of grace infers not an absolute freedom from infirmities. As it is said of the wise and the foolish virgins, that they slumbered and slept.*”—He first explains what is meant by this charge, when applied to a real Christian.

[1.] When applied to a Christian, it may intimate

1. An abatement of his first zeal for God.

2. The child of God may have fallen from his first works as well as from his first love.

3. He may also have fallen into some gross sin.

The author then explains:

[2.] What is meant by the charge of *slumbering* and *sleeping*, as applicable to the mere professors of godliness.

1. They may be less anxious to be considered religious.

2. They may throw off the disguise, and die open apostates.

These considerations open the way for the inquiry, "what is meant by the bridegroom's tarrying?"

Under this head the author adverts to some of the circumstances, which, during the season of probation, serve as occasions of *slumbering*.

1. The matters of religion appear to be of peculiar solemnity and importance, while they are conversed with under the apprehension of approaching death. Hence

2. This world and the things of it, have a vast advantage over us when we believe that our Lord has deferred his coming, and put the evil day far from us.

In applying this part of the subject, we are reminded,

1. that a man's spiritual estate cannot safely be determined from a few remarkable incidents in his life.

We are exhorted,

2. To habituate ourselves to the thoughts of Christ's coming, as a preservative against *slumbering* Christianity.

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The third Sermon illustrates the proposition, "That Christ often comes to our particular judgment at the time wherein he was the least looked for." The author here alludes to *death*. He

I. Substantiates the proposition, by quotations from the Scriptures. He

II. Inquires why unthoughtfulness of death is so general a failing.

1. There is a natural desire of life.

2. Thoughts of death are apt to be considered needless, when we are in flourishing health.

3. There is something in the texture of our natures, which makes them capable of impressions from what is present and sensible, to the prejudice of such an expectancy of Christ's coming.

(1.) Riches often betray us into an unacquaintedness with death and the grave.

(2.) Crosses and disappointments are often improved by the Adversary and our own hearts, to keep our minds from contemplations on death.

He proceeds,

III. To expose the folly of this conduct.

1. Death is not less certain, or less near, by our forgetting that we are dying creatures.

2. By forgetting death, it may be made less safe and comfortable.

This part of the subject is then applied by remarks upon

1. The degeneracy of human nature, evinced in such thoughtlessness.

2. The true reason why religion is so little recommended by the death of such as profess it.

Christians are exhorted

3. To live in the daily expectation of death.

In the fourth Sermon the author comes to treat the proposition,—“That it will fare with us to eternity, according to the state and condition Christ finds us in at his coming.”

He inquires

I. Into the account given of the happiness of those, who are found ready at the coming of Christ.

1. The happiness of the saints in heaven, is represented as “most splendid and magnificent, when set forth under the allusion of their going in to the marriage.”

2.\* Entering with him into the marriage, instructs

\* On the 73th page, II. should have been printed 2.

us further of the unutterable joy that shall be on our heads, when our warfare is accomplished.

(1.) There is the absence of whatever may unhinge the peace of our minds.

(2.) In heaven we shall enjoy whatever is felicitating.

(3.) The blessed God, does, in an immediate way, influence the happiness of glorified spirits.

3. Our Lord asserts the blessedness of the saints in heaven to be of an immortal nature.

The author proceeds to

II. Examine wherein this readiness to meet Christ at death consists.

1. There is an habitual readiness to meet with Christ.

2. An actual preparedness for the coming of Christ.

To this three things are requisite.

1. A regular indifferency and mortification to the present world.

2. Our affections must be set upon things above.

3. We must daily expect our Lord's approach.

The author proceeds to consider

III. How warrantably we look for the happiness of which our Lord speaks, when we are thus prepared for the enjoyment of it.

1. The righteousness of God makes the happiness certain.

2. The *faithfulness* of God is a superadded encouragement to us, when we are looking for eternal life as a gift.

3. The sanctifying work of the Spirit upon the soul, does further warrant us in these expectations.

In applying his subject the author remarks

1. It is active, painful, fruitful, persevering Christianity, and that only, which shall be followed with the gift of eternal life.

2. Let us improve the joy set before us, as a motive to greater fervency in spirit, when we are serving the Lord.

(1.) God expected it should inspire our obedience, when he disclosed the glories of the better world,

(2.) If you are not thus animated by the views of heaven, you will experience but little of the Christian's peace, either in life or death.

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In the fifth Sermon, the author applies his fourth proposition to those who are found *unready* at Christ's coming.

I. Those who are unready will have their condition accordingly.

This point is proved by the Scriptures.

II. The condition of those who are lost.

1. They are excluded heaven.

2. Prayers and tears will be no alleviation of their doom.

3. They shall be under immediate impressions of divine wrath.

III. All this is consistent with the perfection of the divine nature.

1. It is worthy of God to shut out of heaven, all who refused it.

2. It cannot be injurious to any of the divine perfections, that those should be sent to *Hell*, who have freely chosen it.

IV. Application.

(1.) What terror does this doctrine speak to those, who under a profession of godliness, are strangers to the grace of God.

1. Think what is put to the *hazard*.

2. Think for what such things are put in jeopardy.

3. Think of the positive *evils*, to which one is exposed by such conduct.

(2.) It is to fare with the sinner to all eternity, according to the state of his soul at death: then let us *lay a good foundation against the time to come*.

1. Consider how very soon death may overtake you.

2. Your neglecting this call, which God has given you may make your death less easy and your account more dreadful.

In the last of the series of Sermons, the author illustrates his fifth proposition,—“That our being left in the dark, about the time of our death, and the Judgment day, when assured of the certainty of both, should be a sufficient motive to our *watchfulness*, that we may be *found in peace*.”

1. The nature of this duty is to be explained.

(1.) The watchfulness required, implies an avoidance of every thing, which either as an amusement or incumbrance may make us less ready for our Lord's coming.

1. Good men are in danger of being unready, from an ardent pursuit of the world.

2. An ardent pursuit of the world indisposes the mind for entertainments, which are spiritual and divine.

(2.) By their unlawful love of lawful things, have good men been in danger of unreadiness for Christ's coming.

1. We should beware of this unlawful love, because, it obstructs the exercise of our *faith*.

2. We also lose a relish for what is most important.

As we must avoid whatever would unfit us to meet the Saviour, so we must exercise ourselves to whatever may forward our preparation to meet him. We shall acquaint ourselves, so as to be accepted of Christ.

1. If heaven be a place with which we maintain a constant correspondence.

2. If while in this world, we are learning to leave it.

3. If “each day of our lives, we keep all accounts clear and balanced between God and us.”

The author

II. Shows the force of the reasoning, when this duty is urged from the consideration of Son of man's coming in a day, and at an hour that we know not.

We may suppose our Lord to say,

1. Your unwatchfulness cannot prevent my coming.

2. Your unwatchfulness will deprive you of the *comfort* of those, whom I shall find ready.

III. The divine conduct in this disposal of things, is vindicated.

1. God can do nothing but what is best.

2. Obvious inconveniences would attend our knowledge of the time of our death.

3. Taking our situation as it is, we have the most rational motive to continued watchfulness.

IV. Practical application.

1. The wisdom of being truly religious.

2. The folly and danger of security, when we know not what a day may bring forth.

If the Christian properly considers these things—

1. His light will shine.

2. His end will be better than his beginning.

# SERMON I.

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## THE FOLLY OF BEING MERE PROFESSORS.

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MATT. xxv. 1—13.

Then shall the kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the Bridegroom.

And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them :

But the wise took oil in their vessels, with their lamps.

While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

And at midnight there was a cry made, behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him !

Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

And the foolish said unto the wise, give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.

But the wise answered, saying, not so ; lest there be not enough for us and you : but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and they that were ready, went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut.

Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

But he answered and said, Verily, I say unto you, I know you not.

Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour, wherein the son of man cometh.

THAT the parable I have read, is a continuation of our Saviour's discourse, and not a new head of doctrine, appears from the manner in which it is introduced. *Then shall the kingdom of heaven be*

*likened to ten virgins, &c. i. e.* at the time I have been speaking of. What that time was, may be discerned without difficulty, upon carrying back our views towards the close of the preceding chapter. We find there, that our Lord had not only intimated the certainty of a future Judgment, in respect of the thing *itself*; but asserted the uncertainty of the day and hour in which the son of man should come, in respect of us. He tells his disciples how advantageously it would surprise such ministers and private Christians, whom this day should find busied, as became the expectants of the Judgment, though multitudes (clothed with both these characters) should abuse its apprehended distance to security and licentiousness: whom death should place at the bar, when they were least thoughtful about it, the day of Judgment being equally near them, as the day of death. This is the time referred to, in the foregoing parable.

The scope of it I take to be this, *viz.* to press upon his disciples, in the most effectual manner, the duty of watchfulness, which he had been recommending in the chapter foregoing.

Before I enter upon the particular explication of this parable, let me observe to you, that these allegorical discourses being designed to instruct us in heavenly things, by images taken from earthly ones, to communicate some doctrine, or urge some duty explained, or recommended by such allusions, our principal view should be to the scope and drift

of a parable. Many things in it may be inserted purely for ornament's sake, to beautify and complete the allegory; it is not therefore our business to find a meaning to every minute circumstance, but to attend to the lesson which offers itself to our thoughts from its most substantial parts. Watchfulness, as opposed to intemperance, is enjoined in the former chapter: the same duty, but considered in opposition to security, and as consisting in a readiness to meet with Christ at death, and in Judgment, is enforced upon the disciples, in this.

The parable which is here instituted by our Lord, was the more easily taken in by his auditory, because it proceeds upon a custom of an ancient standing among the *Jews*, which they observed in their marriage solemnities. I will give you as distinct an account of this affair, as is needful for enlightening the subject.

The night was the usual time observed both by *Jews* and *Romans*, for celebrating their marriage rites. The *Romans*, had their torches, called *Tedæ*, from the pitchy kind of tree of which they were made; and the *Jews* had their lamps. Among the *Jews*, the bridegroom had a certain number of young men, who attended him to the house of the person he had espoused. These perhaps were the thirty companions which Sampson had to be with him, when he married the Philistine's daughter at Timnath: Judges xiv. 11. They are called by our Saviour, *the children of the bridechamber*, in Matt. ix.

15. and *the friends of the bridegroom*, in John iii. 29. The bridesmaids, who were ordinarily ten in number, having notice of the bridegroom's coming, went out with lighted lamps to meet him, and to conduct him and his train to the betrothed party. And as it was the duty of their place for these virgins to wait the bridegroom's time, however late his coming might be; so upon his and his companions entering the house, *the door was shut*.

I told you, that watchfulness, as opposed to sloth and slumber, and as consisting in an expectation of Christ's coming, and preparedness to meet him, is the point about which he is solicitous to impress the minds of his disciples. To effect this the better, he supposes such a marriage as I have now described; and that out of the ten virgins who were to attend the bridegroom, five only were so provident as to lay in a stock of oil, that might feed their lamps, however tedious the bridegroom might be in his coming: the other five being thoughtless about the matter, and so the oil they had, wasted, and their lamps out, before he came. Starting out of the *slumber*, to which they had given way, upon his *tarrying*, through the alarm of the bridegroom's approach, they are in great consternation: try to get a recruit, but too late; for they had oil to buy, when they should have had it to use. While they are thus busied, such as were ready enter the house with him, and there is no room for them. They are treated as unworthy

of the honor, about the securing which they had expressed so scandalous an indifferēce.

I shall make no other application of this parable, than as it shall come in my way, in discoursing upon these propositions following; *viz.*

*Prop. I.* That among such as make profession of Christianity, very many are but mere professors. *Five* only out of the *ten virgins had oil in their vessels*, and no more *entered* at last with the bridegroom *into the marriage*, though they all *went out to meet him*. *They are not all Israel, which are of Israel.*

*Prop. II.* That the truth of grace infers not an absolute freedom from infirmities. It may sometimes be said of *wise* as well as *foolish virgins*, that they *slumber and sleep*.

*Prop. III.* That Christ often comes to our particular judgment, in that very season wherein we least looked for him. *At midnight there was a cry made, behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him!*

*Prop. IV.* That it is to be with us to eternity, according to the state and condition Christ finds us in at his coming. *They that were ready went in with him to the marriage*; the unready had *the door shut* against them forever.

*Prop. V.* That our being left in the dark about the time of our death, and the Judgment day, while assured of the certainty of both, should be a sufficient motive to our watchfulness, *that we may be found in peace*. *Watch therefore, for ye know neither*

*the day nor the hour, wherein the Son of man cometh.*

We begin with the

I. *Prop!* which was this, *viz.* That among such as make a profession of Christianity, very many are mere professors. You may observe, that not one of the persons of whom our Lord does here make mention, appeared to be a libertine; *to live without God in the world,* and as *if under no law to Christ.* He tells us, that all the *ten were virgins,* *i. e.* persons separated from the rest of mankind by a credible profession of Christianity; and such as seemed to *have escaped the gross corruption and pollution that is in the world through lust.*

The ten set out, as if agreed in the same design, of *meeting the bridegroom.* They profess to believe a future state, and that their main errand into this world, is to get ready for the enjoyment of a better. Carrying their *lamps,* was telling mankind, that they would be accounted the friends of Christ; and that if a little service might suffice, they would reflect a lustre upon their profession by some good works. Thus far do even such go, whom we find in the sequel of the parable to be *castaways.* *They make a gay shew in the flesh;* but could Christ say to them (as he does) *I know you not,* had they been partakers of his *grace in truth?* Or could they have been everlastingly banished heaven, supposing them to have been Christians indeed, without violating that covenant, which is represented as *well ordered in all things, and sure?* What is said

of them, proves that they made a profession; and what happened to them (as the issue of their affairs) that they were mere professors. As a warning to hypocrites and formalists in all succeeding ages, our Lord transmits the memory of these persons to posterity, branded with the imputation of the most egregious *folly*. He enters them upon record as *foolish virgins*.

Before I leave this head, it may not be amiss to spend a few thoughts for settling the particulars following; *viz.*

I. To show you whence it is that any are influenced to take up a profession of religion, and reach no further.

II. To expose their *folly* who have *lamps* only, *without oil in their vessels*, or take up with a *powerless form of godliness*.

I. Let me show you whence it is that any take up a profession of religion, who live and die mere professors. And,

1. In some this profession is taken up, purely through the influence of *education*. Though it is not universally true without any exceptions, yet that maxim of the wise man's will generally hold, *viz. Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it*: Prov. xxii. 6. Were this question put to many in the professing world, *What is the reason of your hope? why do you name Christ's name upon you? why choose your lot with God's despised people? or adhere to*

Christians distinguished by this or the other particular denomination? The substance of their reply would be resolved into this, *viz.* We were brought up this way: this was the religion of our forefathers, and we act as we had them for examples. A conviction of the truth of Christianity, is not the spring of their profession; or God's owning and blessing this way of worshipping him, more than another, the motive to their embracing it. It is by accident that such as these own Christianity in any form; for had their ancestors been libertines, it is not improbable that they would be so too, as their religion is founded in a family precedent.

Now, though we thus retain the influence of education, and by being descended from those who truly feared God, may be secured against downright profaneness, or engaged to take upon us a profession of religion; yet since the saving grace of God comes not to us in the way of natural descent, since they cannot derive to us a divine nature, who are the means of communicating to us this corrupt nature, it is plain that, through the force of education, I may be a Christian in appearance, without having taken one step in the way of life: my *voice* may be *Jacob's* and my *hands Esau's*; I may have a *lamp* without *oil*, and be *dead while I live*. It is a happiness to proceed from such as have been God's covenanted servants, and a privilege to have enjoyed an early pious education; but real Christianity is somewhat more than all

this, and may be separated from it: therefore although this may make me a professor, it may leave me far short of a Christian; it may *wash the outside of the platter, while the inside is full of native impurity and corruption.*

2. As education gives rise to some men's profession of religion, so others set out at the instance of natural conscience, startled, but not savingly convinced. They may have gone on in an habitual neglect of God, and *the things which belong to their peace* through a large part of life, without disturbance: the matters of their souls, religion and another world, may have occasioned them but few serious thoughts. At length some afflictive dispensation of providence rouses the sleeping lion, and the time of adversity calls the thoughtless creature to consider; Eccl. vii. 14. It may be that the hand of God has arrested his *person*; *having the sentence of death in himself*, and eternity unveiled to his mind, he is neither sparing in his censures upon his past folly, nor in his promises of reformation for time to come. All this may flow from mere nature, which recoils at the apprehension of evil, and by an instinct, that is essential to it, dreads a dissolution. The event verifies this remark; the man recovers, and thinks that he has *paid his vows*, and done whatever might be expected in his case, upon his abandoning the former extravagances of life, and putting on a face of religion. He goes on in this *vain show*, his heart as much as ever

estranged from the quickening and sanctifying virtue of the religion he professes: he was *frighted*, but not *convinced*; and though *reformed*, is not *converted*: whereas real Christianity consists, not in our being *mended* only, but *unmade*; for whoever is in *Christ Jesus* (and none else are Christians) *he is a new creature*; 2 Cor. v. 17. he is *καὶν κτίσις* a new creation; *all old things are passed away, and every thing is become new*. Afflictions may put such as have *stood idle all the day long*, upon *bodily service*; but between this and real Christianity, the difference may be as great as between the shadow and substance, a dead image and a living man. Is it strange then that these, though *professors*, should be no more than professors, when they have taken up their religion in a fright, not from an inward persuasion of its reasonableness, excellency, beauty, and *exceedingly great rewards*?

3. A regard to reputation may lie at the bottom of some men's religion, and nothing higher may influence their profession. They are not Christians even in *name* but upon a principle of *honor*: *conscience* has no concern in this part they act in life. What God will think of them comes not into the question; though they may not want solicitude about the good opinion of the world. These low little views have men conducted themselves by, ever since Christ had a church. The evangelist John observes of some of the *chief rulers of the Jews*, that notwithstanding they were convinced

of the truth of the Christian religion, yet a regard to their reputation prevented their owning and embracing it. They adhered to the religion that was most in *vogue*, and would continue of the Jewish church rather than be looked upon as out of the fashion. His words are these; "Among the chief rulers many believed on Jesus, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God:" John xii: 42, 43. Men may reckon it a sort of brand they fix upon themselves, that while so many of their friends and acquaintance are persons famed for exemplary piety, they do not pretend to be Christians. A regard to the good opinion of others does therefore carry them such lengths as it never was in the power of other motives to do; and the love of a good name prevails where all sense of duty to God, or the tenderness they owe to an immortal soul, could not. Now is it to be imagined that these will be any better than mere professors, whose highest aim is at popular applause? This as you know, is attainable in consistency with their being utterly unacquainted with pure and undefiled religion.

4. It is to be feared, that an eye to *secular advantage* is the main influencing principle in some men's profession of Christianity. A mercenary regard to the *loaves* may be the sole reason of their thus far following Christ. There was a large number of people who mingled with his disciples, cal-

led him *Rabbi*, pursued him *over the sea of Tiberias* to Capernaum, whose appearing reverence for our Lord, he himself tells us, had no nobler motive than the satisfying a hungry appetite. See John vi. 26. *Jesus answered them, and said, verily, verily, I say unto you, ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.* And the apostle *Paul*, writing to *Timothy*, mentions a very odd sort of Christians, who supposed that *gain was godliness*: 1 Tim. vi. 5. Their design in appearing religious, was to get *money* by the show; and if this end be attained by it, they will put on any form, or act any part. Many enlisted under our Lord's standard, and joined his retinue, while the prospect of temporal kingdom prevailed among them, who turned their backs upon him, *and walked no more with him*, upon their apprehending that he was to be a *suffering Saviour*. It were to be wished that so vile a spirit had been peculiar to the infant state of Christianity; but what reason to fear that some in our day have professed religion as a *cloak for their covetousness*, the better to insinuate themselves with mankind, and by defrauding and overreaching others to increase their own abundance? Now how splendid soever that profession, with how much soever of exactness and severity it may seem to be attended; can these be any other than mere professors of the religion of Jesus? *Do grapes grow upon thorns and figs upon thistles?* Can they be at once the *members of Christ*, and the *members of an*

*Harlot?* or truly serve two such contrary masters, as *God and Mammon?*

But we shall carry this thought further, under the next particular, and it is all that we shall offer upon this head.

5. Some take up a profession of religion as a cover for the most detestable *private wickedness*. The apostle Paul, in his epistle to Titus, gives us a dismal account of some Judaizing Christians in the Church. Their profession was specious, their practice diabolical. *They professed to know God,* says he, *but in works they denied him, being abominable, disobedient, and to every good work reprobate:* Tit. i. 16. Men may affect to appear like *Saints*, that they may behind the curtain act the *Atheist*, both unobserved and unsuspected: may make long prayers, to devour the widow's house, and more securely wallow in all manner of sensuality. To such a dreadful degree as this has the devil tempted some to affront the Almighty, and impose upon the credulity of his people.

These are all *virgins* to the eye of the world; their *profession* makes them so: though I have shown you that their motives to this profession are very different. One sets out upon the turn of mind received by *education*. Another in compliance with the solicitations of an awakened natural conscience. This man, because it is *fashionable* to own Christianity. Another makes it a cloak for his covetousness. Nay, some are desperate enough to appear

*openly* religious with a view to security as to *private* wickedness.

The Scriptures warrant us in the view I have given of the different principles upon which men *profess* Christianity: and it is by this time sufficiently plain, that many who profess Christianity, may be mere professors.

II. Let me now illustrate the justice and propriety of our Saviour's remark, when he calls all who are professors only, foolish virgins. Their folly will appear upon comparing *profit* and *loss*: laying the *gain* they have made in one scale, and the *damage* they have sustained in another. *What is the hope of the hypocrite, (the formalist, the deceiver, the mere professor,) though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?* Job xxvii, 8. Allowing him to have secured whatever was within the compass of his most extravagant hopes, what a trifle is it for which to plunge a soul into perdition and destruction? Though he should gain the world, saith our Lord, which is more than the most aspiring or avaricious mind could propose to itself, *what is he profited?* Is he not a loser, if an immortal soul is bartered away, for a corruptible, perishing world? Mat. xvi. 26. Is reputation what you aim at,—securing *a good report of all men?* Admitting that herein you have your reward, what is this, if compared with the scorn and reproach of God Almighty? What is your being the world's favourite for a *few days*, if he pronounce you ac-

cursed forever? Have you supposed gain to be godliness? Granting that you have attained your end, is this to be laid in the balance against the *dearable riches*, the *weight of glory*, which have had an inferior interest in your regards? Was sinning in *secrecy* (without suspicion or disturbance) what you desired? Besides that there is no being private from God, *What are the pleasures of sin, which last but for a moment*, compared with the sublime pleasures at God's right hand forevermore? What egregious *folly* to purchase short lived satisfactions, at the expense of suffering horrors without end?

But I shall illustrate the point more particularly in the three following instances; *viz.*

1. Such practically prefer living *hated* of God, to living in his *favor*: this proclaims their *folly*. A Christian, as he is a *partaker of God's likeness*, is the object of his *love*. To be loved of God, includes in it whatever can make up a felicity that is complete. He who *requires truth in the hidden part*, has marked out hypocrites, as the most odious of sinners; as most remote from himself, and offensive to him. Now, he who is a professor only, is a hypocrite: he cheats the world, and would deceive even God himself. Such wretches may *bless themselves*, and good men, who are still fallible, may honor them; but *God's soul loaths them*. And how very uneligible the circumstance, to live under the settled ab-

horrence of a holy and omnipotent God? Your practice, hypocrite, declares this to be your choice, whatever the formal reasonings of your mind may be: and that you prefer such a condition to any ways in which God might discover his *loving kindness*, and *tender mercy*. *Actions* have a language as well as *words*. Yours speak thus: and is the character misapplied, when *folly* is inscribed on such a conduct? Again,

2. You practically prefer *dying accursed*, to *dying in the Lord*: which further exposes your *folly*. Faith so unites the christian to his God, that a separation is impossible even by that death, which separates between soul and body. His life is *a walking with God*, his death *a resting from labor*, and *sleeping in Jesus*. He who was his guide to the grave, does in the very prospect of it disarm the last enemy, and support with his rod and staff through the gloomy vale. When flesh is fainting, and heart failing, he is the strength of his heart whom he has chosen for his satisfying portion. A hypocrite lives abhorred, and dies accursed of God. Death is to him the executioner of Divine vengeance: and the mere professor, is this hypocrite. He can find no discharge from that war, nor assistance in it: but must go through *the hour and struggle alone with the powers of darkness*. Now, how deplorable the case, to have God look on as an enemy, when all creature helps are *waters that fail*, and *physicians of no value*? This you

choose. This your practice proves to have the preference with you, to all that a good man experiences in his last moments. How palpable the *folly*?

Nay, how completely extravagant, when we remember,

3. That you prefer the extremity of hell torments, to all the joy, glory, and blessedness of the heavenly world. A Christian has not fully received the good purchased and promised by his Saviour, when his body is lodged in the grave. All hitherto are rather preparations for his happiness, and earnest of it, than the thing itself. His soul does immediately pass into glory, to be swallowed up of that immortality, and eternal life, which are brought to light in the gospel. And when the resurrection state shall have fitted the body, which was sown in corruption, for a reunion with a perfected, glorified spirit, he shall know in his entire person, what is contained in being kings and priests unto God forever, and blessed with eternal redemption. A hypocrite is transmitted by death to the lowest hell; the place where the worm dies not, and where the fire is not quenched. Nay, as if a common damnation came not up to the malignity of his guilt, nor did sufficiently express the displeasure of God against it, the Holy Ghost refers to the hypocrite's after-state, when he would convey to our minds the idea of perfected misery: *Mat. xxiv. 51.* The mere professor is this hypo-

crite; he chooses to lie down in devouring fire, and to dwell with everlasting burnings. Yes, his practice testifies, that he looks upon all that heaven can furnish out, as a happiness that may strike the mind, as less to be desired. Thus he calls darkness light, and light darkness; *bitterness sweet, and sweetness bitter*. And what can discover *folly* in all its extravagance, more than the account with which I have now entertained you?

Thus I have offered what I designed as to the first proposition, which was this, *viz.* that among such as make a profession of Christianity, very many are but mere professors. I have accounted for the thing, by letting you see the several springs which may influence to such a profession and yet never carry us further; justifying our Saviour's remark, when he pronounces of all who set out to meet him with lamps only, and no oil, that they are foolish virgins.

I shall close this discourse with the following practical reflections. Such as,

1. Let us not draw conclusions to the prejudice of religion, from the miscarriages of such as profess it. Religion is the greatest reality; it has a renewing and transforming virtue: but since a *professor* and a *Christian* are not convertible terms, we should rather attribute the misconduct of those who bear the Christian name to their inexperience of the Christianity they profess, than to any defect in a scheme which makes all such to be new crea-

tures, who thoroughly embrace it. If all who assume the character were Christians indeed, they would live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present world. Consequently the miscarriages of professors must be owing to their *want* of religion: they have neither rise nor encouragement from religion itself. Unfair and inconclusive as this sort of reasoning is, yet we find that it is as common as it is false. My text exposes the mistake, and accounts for the fallacy, when it tells us, that many who profess religion, are *mere* professors.

2. Let what has been said, caution us against resting in an empty profession of Christianity, however specious or plausible it may be. In respect of the divine acceptance, *circumcision availeth not any thing, neither uncircumcision, but the new creature.* All the blessings of the everlasting covenant are suspended upon our believing in Christ, accepting him as he has freely offered himself in the gospel, conforming to his commands, which are holy, just, and good. God never told us, we should have an interest in the contents of this covenant, if we did but *profess* all this to the world. And what though we should be sainted by short sighted creatures like ourselves, while God cannot be deceived, and will not be mocked? It will be but a little time, and the mask shall be taken off. At the tribunal of Christ every creature shall be manifested, naked, and opened; and how shocking the thought of our being convicted of imposture there? While others

build upon hay and stubble, and entertain hopes which will end in confusion, may we build upon a rock, that our house may stand, and our confidence have great recompence of reward.

3. Bless God, Christian, who has made you a sound believer, while there are so many cheats in the professing world. In resigning yourselves to be taught, pardoned, ruled, sanctified, and saved by him, you have abundantly approved your wisdom. As you are upon a better foundation than others, and have more substantial encouragements than they, see that your righteousness exceeds theirs. Labor to grow in grace; "and out of the good treasure of your heart, to bring forth good fruit." Then upon his saying, in the language of the promise, Behold I come quickly! you will be able to echo back again, in the language of faith and hope, Amen, even so come Lord Jesus.

## SERMON II.

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INFIRMITIES CONSISTENT WITH THE TRUTH OF GRACE.

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WE have showed in the foregoing discourse, that a profession of Christianity may be separated from real vital religion; and exposed their *folly*, who content themselves with a *name* to live while they are dead, or rest in an empty, powerless form of godliness. These heads take in what was intended by the first proposition laid down from the text. We proceed to the

II. Which was this, viz. that the truth of Grace does not infer an absolute freedom from infirmities.

This observation is founded upon that part of the parable which informs us that "while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." The charge is drawn up in common against the wise and the foolish virgins; they all slumbered and slept.

It is alike easy in regard of the divine power, to form the new creature at once with the same perfection it shall attain to in heaven, as to work us up to that perfection by degrees. When he implants the principle of a spiritual life, he could

in the same instant give us the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; Eph. iv. 13. It is plain he can, because he actually does all this "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye;" the work of sanctification being completed in the very article of dissolution, for every child of God. But however possible this is in respect of God's power, yet it is consistent with the perfection of his nature, and answers more valuable ends, that we should grow "gradually into an holy temple to the Lord;" and our goodness be as "the morning light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day." By disposing things into this order, God provides for his glory without the least hazard to our safety. What an honor is reflected particularly upon the wisdom, the power, the goodness, and the faithfulness of God, in that so small a spark is kept alive in the floods of temptation from without, and corruption from within? That it outlives all opposition? "The smoking flax is not quenched, nor the bruised reed broken, until judgment is brought forth to victory." Matt. xii. 20. Though the grace of God, where it is communicated in truth, is an "incorruptible seed, which liveth and abideth for ever;" though "many waters" cannot extinguish this celestial fire, "nor the floods drown it;" yet since we are sanctified but in part, the presence of corruption is consistent with the truth of grace.

Our Lord pronounces of such, whom he allows to have been wise virgins (wise to salvation) that

even they had their slumbering and sleeping seasons. If this could not have consisted with real Christianity, is it to be supposed that he would have treated these as his children, and welcomed them to heaven, as we know he did? This would be to give holy things to dogs, and to break through those fixed rules, by which such favors as these are suspended, upon our being made partakers of a divine nature.

It is probable that this particular circumstance, is left upon record, though not as an encouragement to security, yet as a preservative against despair. That a consciousness of our own weakness might not hurry us into a harsh judgment of our spiritual state, though it should be improved as a motive to our walking humbly with God.

I have said thus much, if possible, to disabuse those timorous Christians, whom Satan deceives to their hurt, when he teaches them to infer their being hypocrites and castaways, from their not having already attained, and their not being already perfect. They falsely argue from the remaining presence of sin, to the absence of the grace of God; whereas the most that can be fairly concluded from this state of things, is this, viz. That our grace is weak, when our corruptions are strong. Such hearty lamentations on the account of sin, and earnest desires of complete sanctification, are convincing proofs of our having grace in truth. Strong cries are as certain a sign of life as laughter and joy.

May God bless these hints to the rescuing some mistaken Christian out of this snare of the devil.

The heads upon which I shall enlarge, in pursuing the subject, are these which follow; viz.

I. I shall endeavour to explain the charge summed up in these few words, "they all slumbered and slept;" show you what this signifies, as it is brought against a real Christian; and what it may import, as affirmed of a mere professor. It lies against both wise and foolish virgins at once, but signifies differently as applied to the one, and to the other.

II. We shall examine what is meant by the bridegroom's tarrying, and how this becomes so powerful a temptation to security and slumber.

We will then apply this part of the subject.

I. I am to show you what this charge carries in it, that is advanced against both the wise and the foolish virgins, when our Lord says of them, that they slumbered and slept.

These phrases, in their general acceptation, are opposed to that watchfulness so often recommended in the Scriptures, as furthering our souls' prosperity: that wakeful, lively, and circumspect attendance to our work as Christians, which adorns the gospel, and contributes to the increase of our spiritual strength, and peace, and joy. Read, to this purpose, 1 Thess. v. 6, 7, 8. "Therefore let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober," &c. I need not multiply authorities.

This explication is supported by our Lord himself in my text, and he must be allowed to have known his own meaning. If we compare the 5th with the 13th verse of this chapter, you will see that he makes the slumbering and sleeping of which he speaks, to be the reverse of that watchfulness, which consisted in a fixed expectancy of coming, and a religious preparation for it.

But since a truly gracious person can never come those lengths in this guilt, which may be fact as to a merely nominal Christian, and slumber and sleep in the same sense as may be affirmed of the other; I shall attempt to settle this point, and show you what we are to understand by it, when it refers to a child of God, and what when it is a charge against a mere hypocrite.

[1.] When applied to a Christian, it may intimate such things as these.

(1.) An abatement of his first zeal for God. The soul is filled with lively and very strong workings of affections towards God, upon our first conversion. The tincture it then receives, and the bias that is then put upon it, can never wear off, yet, that love may be at some times suspended in respect of its exercises and actings, that is far from being extinguished in regard of its principle. When the church of Ephesus is reprov'd for having left her first love, this charge refers to interruptions and decays as to the instances in which she had formerly expressed her zeal; it supposes not as if

the love of God were ceased, and had no more place among those famous professors: Rev. ii. 4. Thus God speaks to Jerusalem by the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah; "I remember thee, (saith he) the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown," Jer. ii. 2. The time was, in which your love appeared a kind of transport, and hot as fire; it could put you upon the most difficult and expensive services for me; you hesitated at nothing that might show that you loved me with a pure heart, and fervently: your love has of late seemed to wax cold, as to several instances wherein it did formerly discover itself. And in this sense may we understand that profession of the spouse to Christ, when she says, I sleep but my heart waketh, Cant. v. 2. *i. e.* though I appear not to be such a lively, zealous Christian as at my first setting out, yet mine heart is right with God amidst all mine infirmities. I have love to God in the habit, though it shew not itself as before it did. There is life in the root, though I may be looked upon as a tree twice dead.

Who are Christians against whom Satan has not thus had power, and prevailed? clipt their wings? dulled their spirits? that comparing the present evidences and expressions of their love to God, with what at other times they have given, they have seemed to be invaded with a spirit of slumber? or overrun even with the shadow of death.

(2.) A child of God may fall from his first works,

as well as from his first love, and this be aimed at when he is said to slumber and sleep. The sloth and security which began in the heart, may quickly affect the life; and the fruit follow the present condition of the tree.

There are these two instances in which this drowsiness of soul towards duty will show itself; viz.

As this prevails we shall find,

1. That the law of God will appear less exceedingly broad; and the whole of our duty be brought within a narrower compass than formerly. At first, when conscience was tender, and "the love of God did constrain us," Christ's yoke was easy, and his burthen light. Christianity, in its utmost extent, appeared to be a reasonable service. The convert paid tithe of mint, and anise and cummin, without neglecting the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith; Matt. xxiii. 23. Duties of a personal obligation broke not in upon such as were of a relative nature; nor did the respect shown to relative duties, excuse from such as were more directly personal. Private duties were not allowed as pleas to the neglect of public ones; nor public made to stand in the place of private. Every command of God having the same authority to bind it upon conscience, came effectually recommended to it; and no duty appeared to be so little an one, as that it might be overlooked with safety. But has not this first love cooled?

Satan played the world upon us with so much success, that each of us may say with the strictest regard to truth, "It is not with us as in years that are passed." Have not these been our inward thoughts of many duties? such for instance, as daily, stated, solemn self-examination, and communing with our own hearts, reading, meditation, and private prayer. These duties formerly we durst not omit. "To what purpose is this waste? Matt. xxvi. 8. As spiritual sloth has grown upon us, we have been apt to say of attendance to these and many other religious services, that it was being righteous overmuch: and have abridged our Christianity, lest it should thwart this flesh-pleasing demand; "Yet a little sleep, and a little slumber, and a little more folding the hands to sleep:" Prov. vi. 10. There are few thorough experienced Christians, whose case at one time or other I have not now described; and whenever it has been thus with us, we have been slumbering sleeping Virgins.

2. Another instance in which this drowsiness of soul towards duty will discover itself, is this, viz. we shall by degrees grow careless about the manner in which we discharge duty. While the soul has been wakeful and lively, it has had a regard not only to the matter of duty, but to the temper and frame of spirit in which it has been attended to. It has not been enough to yield it peace upon reflection, that such and such services were not omit-

ted, if they have not been rightly performed; that sin has been confessed, if the soul has not been humbled and broken for it; mercies acknowledged, if love to God has not accompanied these acknowledgments, our gratitude been enlarged, and the soul confirmed in its dependence on God for the future. The labor of the lips passes not for prayer, when the secret fervent desires of the heart are not expressed hereby; nor have we acquitted ourselves to our own satisfaction in reading, hearing, meditation, if God has not been met with in these duties, by the soul which followed hard after him. We have been jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy, lest we miss what above all things we labored after, which is, that "whether present or absent, we might be accepted of God," 2 Cor. v. 9.

When security and slumber invade, what carelessness succeeds in the place of our former caution? What lukewarmness instead of our wonted zeal? God is put off with the *lame and blind for a sacrifice*, as if it were of little or no consequence how we acted in religion, so that the work was *done*. How often has the world, and the things of it, thus entangled, and overcome us—given our corruptions the advantage, so that when we have not dared wholly to neglect duty, we have gone about it with that sluggishness and indevotion, as if the God with whom we had to do, were not a spirit; or the service which he required, spiritual

worship? Too frequently have we read, heard, and communicated thus out of frame; been heedless, lifeless, our hearts not warmed in duty, and (which is worse) our sorrow not stirred for such trifling with a holy God.

In these instances will the drowsiness of soul towards duty, of which we speak, discover itself; viz. it will tempt us to abridge our Christianity, lessen the number of duties to which we are obliged, and make us heedless as to the manner of discharging such as we still believe to be duties.

3. Slumbering and sleeping when applied to a Christian, may signify not only falling from his first works, but falling into some gross sin. Though all who have escaped the pollutions of the world, are not again entangled and overcome; yet God has left some such to themselves, that they might see the evil that is in them, and instead of being high-minded, might fear. David and Peter are monitors of the frailty of human nature. Their story proves that true grace may subsist where there are many and very strong corruptions; and that a soul most truly wakeful, vigorous, and active, may in a small compass of time be not only in a slumbering way, but so thoroughly asleep, as that all action as a Christian ceases. It is but rarely that any are thus surprized, whom God has apprehended as his own; and when they are, such as are born of God do not sin as others: their seed abiding in them, they cannot so sin, because they

are born of God. I mean, that they cannot sin with the same consent of will, with the same remorselessness upon reflection, with the same frequency or perseverance: 1 John iii. 9. Their slips are accidental, and when they fall, they quickly rise again. It is impossible that they should backslide with a perpetual backsliding, or draw back to perdition; they are eventually safe from the counsel and covenant of God, and shall be kept to salvation by his mighty power.

In these respects, may even the wise virgins be said to slumber and sleep. They may abate in the liveliness of their affection towards God, be less impartial in their obedience, grow formal and careless in the manner of discharging duty, by dropping their guard, be surprised into presumptuous sin. Thus far may they decline and miscarry, in whom *the root of matter is*: who shall be recovered by grace, and glorified in heaven; for these wise virgins awoke from their slumber, were ready at the bridegroom's approach, and went with him in to the marriage.

[2.] I am next to open the import of these phrases, as they are applicable to *mere professors*; for it is observed of the foolish virgins, as well as the wise, that they slumbered and slept.

Considering the charge as advanced against these hypocrites, it may suggest such things as these.

1. Their forbearing their former care, even to be thought religious. The mere professor answers all his ends, by an outside show. He aims at nothing which is not to be secured by his having a name to live. Accordingly, while he acts consistently with himself, he sits before God, as his people do. *He apes* a Christian, treading in his steps as far as this may be done, and he an hypocrite still. He must be at *some* expense, though it is not *great*, who would pass for religious; for notwithstanding that our hearts are exempt from the remarks of the most inquisitive eye, and are not to be judged by man's judgment, yet men will form sentiments in our favor, or otherwise, as we do or do not keep up the face of religion. Now, when such as were famous for walking to the view of the world blameless, tire of this affected tenderness and scrupulosity, instead of that fictitious zeal by which they deceived many, indulge in a coldness, looseness, and obvious disregard of what they seemed to pursue with a fervor of mind, they may be said to slumber and sleep; for they are the reverse of what they themselves were, while upon the watch for deceiving the world. And considering these persons as destitute of an inward fixed respect to God, nothing less than which can keep the soul steady, is it strange if they run into absurdities in practice? Where nothing higher than a view to reputation makes a man a professor, can we won-

der if in many instances he should act in contradiction to a principle, which he may be disposed to alter or despise in many instances?

Though the foolish virgins of whom our Lord speaks, set out to appearance with a view to the meeting the bridegroom, it is probable that from a regard to their ill management of this profession, their wearying of the measures by which it was to be supported with credit, and indifferency about the reflections of mankind upon their remissness, he brings them into the number of such as slumbered and slept.

2. There may be intimated in this charge, that such do throw off the disguise, and die apostates after a plausible profession. This interpretation is favoured by what occurs in the eighth verse of this chapter, where it is said of the foolish virgins, that their lamps were gone out. Their lamps may signify their profession; the bridegroom's coming, Christ's summoning them by death to judgment: consequently, their lamps being out at his coming, their dying apostates. Demas carried on a show of christianity, while it served his purpose, who made religion but a means to an end truly sordid and base; and when it appeared unlikely that he should get any more by the name, he resolves to be no longer called a Christian. He quits the cause at once, through a predominant love to the present world: 2 Tim. iv. 10. Christ foretold such a sort of Christians, who for a while should believe,

or pretend to believe, but in the time of temptation should fall away: Luke viii. 13. And the apostle to the Hebrews supposes this to be a possible case, as to such who came many lengths further, than barely taking up the Christian name; though he pronounces the recovery of such to be impossible. Some may be enlightened, says he, taste of the heavenly gift, be partakers, in a lower sense, of the Holy Ghost, they may have had a kind of relish of the good word of God, felt the powers of the world to come, and yet fall away, so as not to be renewed again by repentance; Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6. This is slumbering with a witness, yes, it is sleeping the sleep of death.

What has been said may suffice for explaining this part of the subject, in which it is observed of both the wise and foolish virgins, that they slumbered and slept. We have considered whercin the nature of this charge lies, and what it carries in it as it is advanced against Christians, and as it is brought against hypocrites, or mere professors.

This was the first general head.

II. We will enquire what is meant by the bridegroom's tarrying, and how this comes to be so powerful a temptation to security and slumber. "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept."

I might say, that the eternal Son of God did eminently come into our world, when the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. As a view to our

good brought him hither, so he left us with a design of promoting our best interests. And to complete that gracious purpose, he has engaged to come a second time to our salvation, *i. e.* solemnly to adjudge us to, and possess us of it. Heb. ix. 28. "This vision is for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and shall not lie; though it tarry, yet should we wait for it, because it will surely come:" Hab. ii. 3. But beside the coming of Christ in his incarnation, and his coming upon the consummation of all things, as the judge of quick and dead, the Scriptures hint at another coming of Christ, *viz.* at death: which time, to such as it overtakes, is equivalent to the end of the world. Our Lord may have this in his thoughts, when he speaks of the householder's return from his journey, and the bridegroom's coming; and the apostle Paul when he says to the Christian Hebrews, yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry; Heb. x. 37.

Now his tarrying intimates the abundant exercise of his patience towards his creatures in a trial state: his forbearing to execute sentence speedily, and call them to *give an account of their stewardship*. And the text may be designed to inform us what usually falls out in the course of things, during such an interval; the infirmities of Christians, the instability and unsettledness of hypocrites; the first decline, the other apostatize. This remark is founded upon the manner of expression, that

*While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.*

But it is not improbable that this tarrying of the bridegroom is designed to point us to what they made an occasion of their slumber; or what proved, through their abuse of it, a powerful and too effectual temptation to it.

I will take it in this light, and endeavour to account for the thing. We may offer this in the

1st place, That the matters of religion appear to be of peculiar solemnity and importance, while they are conversed with under the apprehension of approaching death. A man cannot trifle in duty, be easy with a wandering, confused, or drowsy spirit, while this thought is upon his mind, viz. I am nearer the end of my work, and as near my reward; these duties will be called over in public a very short while hence, either to my praise or confusion, as I have been hearty in what I have done, or attended the work of the Lord negligently. A mere hypocrite, who is in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity, even *he* will keep up his profession, and abound in external services, while his mind feels the force of this awful thought. Add,

2. That this world, and the things of it, have a vast advantage over us, when we believe that our Lord has deferred his coming, and put the evil day far from us. As we never converse so falsely with things seen and temporal, as when we do it, persuaded that we shall quickly leave them; so it is

scarce possible but that they should injure us, when we have to do with them under the prejudice of this false reasoning: where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were, from the beginning of the creation: 2 Pet. iii. 4. This represents the objects which surround us in a false light, decks them with enchanting charms; the mind goes after them with a sort of restless desire, as if there were a happiness at length found out, in what we hitherto falsely called empty and vain. May not this forfeit the presence and aids of that spirit, whose departure, if continued, would not only impoverish the soul, but prove the death of it? Conversing with this world as an *abiding city*, has a stupifying quality in it; and although we live as those who are looking for the coming of the great God our Saviour, our souls will prosper, and this earth be trodden under our feet; yet we shall be poor Christians (slothful, heavy, sleepy Christians) if we are once wrought into an inexpectancy of the coming of our Lord.

Now, is a Christian thus endangered by being thus circumstanced? and can it surprise us that the hypocrite, who may endure for a while, does at length wither away, when he has no root in him?

For the application of this part of the subject, let me say,

1. What we have heard teaches us how unwarrantable that judgment is, which we form of a man's

spiritual estate, from some few remarkable incidents in his life. A person may do many good actions, who is not a good man; another may be truly gracious, who acts in some respects very unlike a Christian. We find that slumbering and sleeping did not forfeit the character of wise virgins, to those against whom the charge was truly laid. This was an *accidental* infirmity, whereas for the *general*, their lives were ordered according to God's word. Christ could look them through, and he discovered *fire* under the *ashes*; *grace* amidst so amazing *corruptions*: and pronounces those to be wise, whom we should have stigmatized as foolish virgins. But, remember that this doctrine is abused, if it is made either a temptation to sin, or an encouragement to our being more easy in it. Whenever this is the case with us, it makes it no hard matter to judge of our condition God-ward: such a temper being the reverse to what he himself has told us is to be found in his children.

2. Let us habituate ourselves to the thoughts of Christ's coming, as a preservative against slumbering Christianity. However remote from our time the conflagration of this visible frame of nature may be, and our Lord's coming to dispatch the affair of the general judgment, yet *this night may your soul or mine be required at our hands*; the Judge may be nigh us, even at the door. *In a moment we go down to the grave*; and it will be the end of the world to us, when we are gathered to

our long home. Did we see that our feet stood in such slippery places, that in the *midst of life we are in death*, not a hand's breadth between us and the grave, even while we are in our best estate; "what manner of persons should we be, in all holy conversation and godliness? doing whatever our hands find to do, with all our might, lest coming suddenly, he should find us sleeping?"

The propriety and aptitude of this means are obvious upon the slightest reflection. Make conscience of *using* it as you would not,

(1.) Bring a reproach upon the Redeemer's name and cause. Religion is wounded by the unwary and uncircumspect deportment of its votaries, and if we have ingenuous spirits, it will touch us to the quick to think that the good ways of God are blasphemed upon our account. When a Christian's love appears to be waxed cold, by his growing weary in well doing, when there are spots in his life, who should be blameless, harmless, and shine as a light in the world; these things bring up an evil report of the master and the work he has chosen. Men who have never experienced its power, will say that there is nothing in religion, and that such tire of it, who have made the utmost trial; and when he comes to have conscience thoroughly awakened, this will prove to the Christian as an iron that enters into his soul. Guard against this inconvenience, by inuring the mind to a daily looking for Christ.

(2.) Fall in with this advice, as you would not perplex and embarrass the affairs of your soul. By giving way to a spirit of slumber, you not only injure religion, but greatly hurt yourselves. You cannot tell where this will stop; though of this you may be certain, it will cost you very dear before you are restored whence you have fallen. You shall find it an evil thing and a bitter, that you looked cold upon God, or behaved in his work as though you were to serve him for nought. Now did any man ever yet hate his own flesh, and not rather nourish and cherish it? If you would avoid his punishment, keep yourselves clear of the slumbering Christian's guilt; and if you would be innocent of this great transgression, accustom yourselves to the thought, and live in the expectation of Christ's coming.

*Blessed is that servant, whom when he comes, he shall find in such a posture. He will publicly applaud his vigilance and fidelity; make him ruler over much, who was faithful over a little, adjudging him to enter into his master's joy. But if a pretended servant of his shall say in his heart, my lord delayeth his coming; and presuming upon this, shall abandon himself to libertinism and excess, "the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looked not for him, and in an hour which he is not aware of, and shall cut him in sunder, appointing him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

## SERMON III.

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WHEN WE THINK NOT, THE LORD COMETH.

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You have seen, that the presence of sin may consist with the truth of grace; that the wise virgins have their slumbering seasons as well as the foolish; and that the bridegroom's tarrying is abused both by the one and the other; as an occasion of, and temptation to, this particular sin.

These heads comprehend all we aimed at under the second proposition. We go on to the

III. *Prop.* mentioned from these words, which was this, *viz.* That Christ often comes to our particular judgment, at the time wherein he was least looked for.

I gather this from what occurs in the sixth verse of this chapter, where the words are these, *viz.* "At midnight there was a cry made, behold the bridegroom cometh! go ye out to meet him."

It is plain that our Lord pursues the allusion to the Jewish custom in their marriages, of which I took notice when we first entered upon this parable. The bride elect continued in her father's house, and made not the least advance towards her spouse;

this would have been reckoned an indecent forwardness, and a forfeiture of the woman's modesty; but upon notice given of his approach, the virgins who were in waiting, went forth with their lamps, to conduct him to the house, where she expected his arrival. He came early in the night, but we are told that in this case the usual time was passed, and all thoughts of his coming at an end; they indulge in slumber and sleep, and at this very juncture are roused with the cry, "behold the bridegroom cometh!" at midnight, when they had done watching and expecting, and concluded that they might safely venture to sleep on and take their rest; in the hour of which they thought not, he cometh.

Some will have the coming of Christ, which is here spoken of, to be his appearance in the last judgment. They make this midnight cry to be the alarm that shall be given by the voice of an archangel, and the trump of God, for such as are in their graves to come forth. They refer to that description of the apostle Paul, which he gives 1 Thess. iv. 16. Admitting this passage to be capable of such an interpretation, yet it breaks not in upon our Lord's design, to suppose that he points in these words at his coming in the article of death, to end our state of trial, and enter us into the world of recompenses and rewards. His coming to us at death, is in a great measure equivalent to his coming at judgment; for then are we happy or

miserable, according to the different qualities of our past actions in life, though at judgment our state is publicly and unchangeably fixed, and we shall experience an increase of pleasure or pain upon the resurrection of the body: so that nothing forbids our attending to our Saviour's words, as looking this way in the purport of them: I mean to his coming by death to our particular judgment.

That this particular judgment is no farther off than the time of our death, is sufficiently intimated, when the Scriptures mention our being present with the Lord, as what is immediately the Christian's case upon his being absent from the body; and add his lifting up his eyes in hell, as what immediately followed upon the wicked man's death. Compare 2 Cor. v. 8. with Luke xvi. 22, 23.

I shall therefore pursue this as the subject contained in this part of the parable, viz. that Christ often comes by death to our particular judgment, when we are least thoughtful of his coming.

In prosecuting which, we will attend to this method:

I. Endeavor to support this remark, by showing you what foundation it has in the Scriptures.

II. Inquire whence it comes to pass, that unthoughtfulness of death is so general a failing.

III. Expose the folly of growing thoughtless and secure in this instance.

We will then improve this part of the subject in a practical way.

I. I am to justify this remark, by shewing you what foundation it has in the holy Scriptures, viz. That Christ usually comes to call us to an account, when we least expected his coming. I do not say, that all are surprised, out of time, into eternity. Paul had learnt to die daily, 1 Cor. xv. 31. and many have actually attained what Peter recommended to the Christians of his day, lived in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for, and hasting unto the coming of the day of God: 2 Pet. iii. 11, 12. We only say that it is common for men to be called to die, when they are pleasing themselves with the prospect of a long life. A few particular exceptions endanger not the truth of this general observation.

How abundantly does our Lord himself support this, when he says, "As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days of Noah which were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and *knew not* until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be:" Mat. xxiv. 37, 38, 39. At the 43d verse of the same chapter he compares it to the thief coming in a watch of the night, in which the good man of the house thought himself secure; of which he *knew not*. And (not to multiply quotations,) our Lord elsewhere asserts, that *this day shall come upon men unawares*, and that *as a*

*snare it shall come on all them who dwell on the face of the earth*: Luke xxi. 34, 35. The bird would not be taken in the snare did she know it, and look for it; but is then entangled, when least apprehensive of danger.

You will object, perhaps, that these passages refer to the general judgment, and so are not properly advanced in the present case. As to this, let me say, that they will hold good when applied to Christ's coming to our particular judgment, as well as when supposed to respect the last and general one; otherwise the parable of the foolish rich man in the gospel is wrong, even as to the very scope and design of it. I shall repeat as much of that parable as is needful to our purpose. This, it seems, was the resolution taken by that stupid worldling,—“I will say to my soul, soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry; but God said to him, Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee:” Luke xii. 19, 20. *i. e.* Thou art providing for futurity, and because thine estate may hold out for many years' revels, art fool enough to imagine that death must be at a vast distance; but you may never be nearer dying, than when the grave is most out of sight: this is thy case, for you talk of living and rioting for years to come, whereas *this night you shall die.*

Certainly when we are commanded to watch, and wait for his coming, this can mean no other

than Christ's coming by death: and yet this is urged upon us frequently in Scripture from that consideration, which amounts to all we assert, viz. Christ's coming (in this way) at a day and hour we looked not for: see Matt. xxiv. 42. Mark xiii. 35; 36, 37. Why is this doctrine carried through the gospel? the same case stated over and over again, if this were not fact?—one of importance to be set right about, though a truth which our minds do not without difficulty fall under the force and influence of?

II. Let us now inquire whence it comes to pass, that unthoughtfulness of death is so general a failing; and the coming of Christ at a time in which we looked not for it. His coming can never be unsafe to a gracious person, though in some circumstances it may be less agreeable than in others. Habitual preparation they have, when born of God; and upon their believing, are included in that covenant, which makes their salvation absolutely safe. But he must be actually ready, who would sing of victory in the last conflict, and rejoice upon his finding the grave. Among other things which make up this actual preparation, a lively and affecting prospect of Christ's coming, and a patient waiting for it, are no small ingredients. We do not mean, therefore, when we speak of Christ's surprizing us by death, that this is ever done so as to put a regenerated person's well-being for eternity into the least hazard; but when he

comes, and not looked for, a good man may want hope in his death, and a sinner is in the way of being irrecoverably lost.

Now the case being stated in this light, I proceed to show you what account may be given of the reasons of so general an infatuation: that though *The living know that they must die*, yet it is so common both to good men and bad, to indulge in a forgetfulness of their great change. And

1. There is a natural desire of life, that is a part of our constitution in good men and bad; this hinders us as to a serious, prevailing expectancy of Christ's coming. Death considered as the dissolution of the present frame, as the divorcing two such intimates as soul and body, as leaving what we see, and have long pleasurably enjoyed, to enter into an unseen eternal world, has somewhat in it ungrateful and shocking to nature. Where that faith is strong, *which is the evidence of unseen things*, there may remain some sort of a dislike of death; and in proportion to the weakness of this faith, we shall feel still more the force of this universal law. Our incarnate Redeemer was not without some seeming abhorrency of death, as *an enemy to nature*, though his human will yields to the divine, considering it as a necessary act of obedience, and essential to his discharge of the Mediatorial character. Now, we do not frequently, and of choice, converse with what has somewhat so disagreeable to us in it, considering us under the power of this

universal law of nature. By begetting us to the hopes of a better life, grace contributes towards weaning us from this ; but still, while we are in the body, we shall experience this among other inconveniencies of an embodied estate, viz. we shall find it hard to keep ourselves in a lively, cheerful, constant expectation of what is, and will be resented as a sore trial to flesh and blood. We are in danger,

1: Of accounting these thoughts needless, while in an established and flourishing state of health. No man can be so abandoned, as to conclude that he is immortal, because as yet he feels not the pangs and agonies, which are the harbingers of death ; but the best are too prone to think that death is at a distance, while they neither see nor feel any thing like the forerunners of that last enemy. While their breasts are full of milk, and their bones of marrow, they go forth to their labor as giants refreshed with wine : so full an enjoyment of life, sets them above any apprehensions of death. At least they may believe that they shall die, yet they conclude that there are many stages between them and the house appointed for all the living. The wise man intimates the force of this temptation, that it works, and too often prevails in this way, when he says in a satire upon such indiscretion, " Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, let thine heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth ; walk in the ways of thine heart, and

in the sight of thine eyes : but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment, Eccles. xi. 9. Though you may allow that grey hairs and the grave should be well acquainted, that are in a constant nearness to one another ; yet you reckon that youth and judgment may be less intimate : as if there were such a certain length to be run, before you could meet the grave. And who of us has not been more or less ensnared by the same erroneous way of thinking ; and in the prime and vigour of life, thought it a sort of impertinence to converse with a winding-sheet, and dwell among the ruins of a grave ?

2. As the natural desire of life implanted in each of us, makes the thought of death appear improper in the time of health ; so it makes it unpleasant on a bed of languishing. They who have learned to believe, that our life is but a vapour, and that we are crushed as easily as the moth, will find it less difficult to bear in fact, what they have often suffered in speculation ; deliberately, seriously, and of choice, done so. But a good man little used to this mental converse with the grave, will be apt to look into it with reluctance, when brought more in view. Instead of Paul's desire to depart, he will choose pious David's prayer, " O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more ;" Ps. xxxix. 13. We have many times seen this desire of life express itself, even where the hopes of life have been taken away ; and the

Christian brought, with extreme difficulty, to entertain the sentence of death in himself.

Now, does not this account in some measure for Christ's coming when we least expected it? In health the thought has appeared improper, in sickness unpleasant; we are unwilling to believe what we wish to be untrue, and so may be tempted to build upon life, till the arrow strike us through the liver.

3. There is something in the texture of our natures, which makes them capable of impressions from what is present and sensible, to the prejudice of such an expectancy of Christ as is our duty. They came not so out of the hands of God; he made them upright; but ever since we fell from him, there has been a cleaving to the creature, which, like a sort of contagion, has infected the whole human race. Christ came into the world, as the restorer of the apostacy; and with a particular view to the bringing us back again, from the creature to God. Where his grace has savingly apprehended any, this design of his incarnation is in part accomplished to them; the stream of their affections is altered, and they are renewed in the spirit of their minds: but how many eccentric motions, to let them know, that what is perfect is not yet come?

Whatever are their circumstances in life, they will show, at some time or other, that they are not thoroughly cured of this deep and hereditary illness. For,

(1.) The affluence of this world's good often betrays us into an unacquaintedness with death and the grave. The rich man did not say, Soul, take thine ease, indulge in pleasure, discharge all thoughts of death, live merrily for years to come, until he was a *rich* man; his abundance greatly increased, that he *knew not where to bestow his goods*. The more delightful his circumstances, the greater his unwillingness to leave such a goodly heritage; and so weak was he, as to reckon upon it, that because he could not be quickly brought to a liking of death, he should not be suddenly disturbed by it. If a prosperous state were not attended with special temptation, Christ would not have carried the point so far, as to pronounce it next to impossible for *a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven*; Mat. xix. 24. Nor had Agur's wish discovered so great wisdom, when he prefers food convenient to the most exuberant fulness; Prov. xxx. 3. How many fools, *i. e.* sinners, has prosperity destroyed! It has furnished out such a variety of amusements to engage the mind, that no time or place has been left for those thoughts, that have been of the most important nature. They supposed that the mountain should never be moved, which stood firm for the present; and while they have been building tabernacles here, as in a city that had foundations, have seen the hand writing upon the wall: regardless of death till actually under his arrest. And have not good men shown the

corruption of their natures when raised to those heights where but few can maintain their standing? They have grown indolent when their situation was easy: *settled on their lees, when they had no changes*; and got the spirit of the world with its plenty.

These things engage the mind, they are good, they are present, we see them, taste them, handle them; and how often have they made things infinitely greater and better, abate as to their worth and importance, purely as invisible, distant, and future? I look upon this as one of the most dangerous snares in a prosperous circumstance, that it is apt to make us forget that we are dying creatures; and as this thought, while it commands the mind, will invigorate our obedience, it will be lame and defective in proportion as our minds cease to be under the impression of this thought. But,

(2.) Crosses and disappointments in the world are improved by Satan and our own wicked hearts, to keep us strangers to dying work. Our Saviour tells us thus much, when, Luke xxi. 34. he says, take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, (*μερίμναις*, anxious, perplexing, distracting cares) and so that day come upon you unawares. It seems, by our Lords caution directed to his disciples, that good men are not out of danger of sensuality, in a soft and easy way of life; or of excessive solicitude about worldly things,

when they are kept with a straighter hand. And it is as obvious from this passage, that intemperate care about getting or keeping the world, as much unfits us for dying like Christians, as an intemperate enjoyment of it. There is a thoughtfulness for the morrow that is encouraged by religion, that interferes not with the Christian character; no, it rather beautifies and recommends it; but to give a proper measure of heed, and attention to these things, to avoid the two criminal extremes, here is the grand difficulty. Says a good man if God bless me to recover from my present straits, and again brings my feet into a plain path, I hope I shall serve him with less distraction; but at present a care about the world, which I cannot shake off, follows me whithersoever I go, and mingles itself with all the actions of my life. Satan works upon the corruption of our natures, by the present posture of things; and does he not succeed, to the keeping the mind in a continued hurry about more useful and comfortable life, till the thought of dying is by degrees, worn out of the mind, as though poverty had made men immortal?

You see, that the affluence of this world charms the mind into an unthoughtfulness of death; its straits and difficulties so busy it about a supply, that it is as much in danger of forgetting the one thing needful this way. There is no circumstance of life which furnishes not avocations from this point, and does not help to betray us into un-

mindfulness of Christ's coming. And thus far we are wrought into an unfitness for being found of him in peace.

Having proved that Christ usually comes when we least looked for his coming, and given you some general account whence it is that this happens to be so; I am now,

III. To expose the folly of this conduct, upon whomsoever it is chargeable.

This point will be quickly issued, if you will admit the particulars which follow. Such as,

1. Death is not less certain, or less near, by your forgetting that you are dying creatures. Were it only a possible thing that you might die, it would shew weakness to overlook an event so very momentous, though barely possible. Allowing it to be probable, the folly is aggravated. But can it be less than downright madness, to live thoughtless of death, when it is certain that we must die? when there is an unalterable statute of Heaven, by which this is appointed unto all men? Heb. ix. 27. Were our death fixed upon the revolution of so many ages, it would be less a forfeiture of our wisdom though it abode not continually upon the imagination of the thoughts of our hearts. Were there so many preliminaries to be settled, before which it could not make the attack, notice of which was to be given in form, this would abate the indiscretion, though we did sometimes discharge that painful thought from our minds; but may my next breath be my

last? Christ come without this preamble? and strike me into the grave, when I thought myself furthest from it? It is folly then that will admit no alleviation, if I live as if that would not reach me in a year, that may overtake me in a moment, and settle my soul's state for eternity. And,

2. Though death is neither less certain, nor near, by forgetting it, yet it may hereby be less safe and comfortable. All repentance which is sincere and hearty, is saving; but we cannot say that all late repentance is sincere. The foolish virgins were for trimming their lamps, when they heard that the bridegroom was come; every poor wretch is for doing his best to get into some sort of readiness, when he sees himself about to appear before God: but my text tells us, that those unhappy creatures, whom we find in such a hurry to set themselves off as Christ's friends, were shut out, and publicly disowned by him. To how plain a hazard do they put their eternal safety, who leave the work of making their peace with God to a death bed? *i. e.* put it off till they have nothing else to do? when many have scarce time to say *Lord save me*, between life and death? How weak, to lay a scheme, and trust a soul and eternity upon it, when the odds are more than ten thousand to one, whether ever it will bear? To build all our hopes upon what is to be done when we come to die; whereas, beside that we know

not whether we shall have the exercise of reason upon a sick bed, and are much less assured of the Spirit's assistance to work in us the repentance and faith, without which we cannot be saved: there would be nothing new in the case, supposing that we perceived not that we were *sick*, till in the arms of *death*. I observed before, that a Christian's safety is not endangered, though his Lord should come, when he looked not for him; but how great difference between dying in safety, and dying in triumph? That good man, who shall *shine in the firmament of God forever*, may have died in a cloud; not having known his own safety, missed all the inward peace and joy, which should have filled his mind, had he attained to a full assurance of hope in the end. And how wrong to rob ourselves of such choice cordials, in such a time of need? How injurious to religion, which it is our duty to recommend both in life and death? At that time the dearest friends will fail; aye, our heart and flesh will fail, and he only lays up a stock of living comforts against that dying time, whose life is a continued waiting until that change shall come.

Let us briefly apply this part of the subject.

1. From the scope of this discourse, it is natural to observe the degeneracy of human nature, in our being shy of conversing with death, when so encouraged to such an acquaintance. If dying, there remained nothing *but a fearful looking for of*

*vengeance and fiery indignation*, and after we had discharged the tribute we owe to death natural, over us the second death did receive power; this being now but the beginning of sorrow, no wonder if horror seized us upon the prospect of the grave. But can we remember, that *life and immortality are brought to light*, that Christ has destroyed him who had the power of death, to release from their bondage such who through fear of death were subject to it? Can we see the last enemy disarmed, the grave sanctified as a place of rest to our weary bodies, and our dying but our passing from the wilderness into the promised land? How unjustifiable now our aversion to the thoughts of dying? In this amiable light do the Scriptures set off the Christian's circumstances; what a mixture of folly and sin then in this affected strangeness! We should esteem that to be the day of the gladness of our hearts, which is the day of our redemption from a body of sin and death: pleasurably expect the approach of that season, in which we shall be able to say, my soul, the enemies thou seest to-day, thou shalt see no more forever. When sanctification shall be completed, all the annoying fruits and consequences of sin be no more; the time of your death, Christian, is this happy period: is it not a reproach to your character then, that your Lord should come when you looked not for him? What, are earth and natural life so dear, that the thought of leaving them is grievous, when this shall

follow upon it? How little agreement between such a spirit as this, and the *name* that is named upon you!

2. You see the true reason why religion is so little recommended by the death of such as profess it. It is not peculiar to the children of this world to avoid familiarity with the grave; this weakness they have in common with *the children of light*. It is a pity that when religion has provided for turning the serpent into a rod, and the shadow of death into the morning, its votaries should still remain liable to this infirmity; yet it is but too certain, that in this very article we see little to distinguish the precious from the vile. How few declare plainly to the world in their daily walk, that they are looking for another, a better, even an heavenly country? That they judge themselves to be but pilgrims and strangers on earth, as were all their fathers? How few to whom the reverse is not applicable, instead of keeping this in remembrance, that they were shortly to put off those tabernacles? Now, can it be expected that they should finish their course with joy, and in their last acts exemplify the gain of godliness, whom death rather breaks in upon unawares, than meets after a long and regular expectation of its coming? Here is the reason why the name and cause of God have not more honor reflected upon them by the *death of his saints*, viz. the grave is out of sight, dying work forgotten, and in an hour when they looked not for it, their Lord comes.

3. As you walk every day, Christian, upon the brink of eternity, live in the daily expectation of death. This is the best way to enjoy life while it lasts, and advantageously to meet death whenever it comes. Endeavor to get above all anxious desires of life, and slavish fears of death; and nothing can harm you, if you are thus the followers of that which is good. By your moderation to all things under the sun, shew that you believe the Lord is at hand. Beside the influence which this will have upon the innocence and fruitfulness of life, you may then say, with your dying breath, "I know that if this house of my tabernacle that is earthly were dissolved; I have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; that when this shall fail, I shall be received into everlasting habitations. Happy the person who is in such a case: "Mark the perfect man, behold the upright, the end of that man is peace." May that God who has directed our hearts into his fear, direct us through the whole of life, to such a patient looking for Christ.

## SERMON. IV.

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AS DEATH LEAVES US, JUDGMENT FINDS US.

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WE have considered unthoughtfulness of death, as a general failing. No character exempts from this guilt, for it is charged upon both wise and foolish virgins. We have examined into the grounds and reasons of the case; showing you the weakness and folly of indulging a forgetfulness of this nature.

We come now to treat of the

IV. *Prop.* That it will fare with us to eternity, according to the state and condition Christ finds us in at his coming. This offers itself from those parts of the parable where it is observed that such as were ready, entered in to the marriage; and such whom his coming found unprepared to meet him, were shut out for ever.

The wise man says, if the tree fall toward the south or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be; Eccl. xi. 3. The remark will hold, as to our falling by the stroke of death. If we die in the Lord, we shall be for ever with him; if children of wrath, this wrath shall abide upon us for ever. We are not proper-

ly in a state of trial while upon earth, if being discharged from the body, a Christian had yet more to do or bear as a necessary preparative for glory; or a sinner put under a fresh dispensation of the grace of God. The doctrine of purgatory is a gainful artifice, but the cheat would never have taken, had not men been first taught that ignorance of the bible was a virtue; and that he had the most Christian spirit, who presumed not to examine any one article that carried the impression of the infallible church. It offers manifest violence to this divine revelation, and sinks the credit of our Redeemer's mediatory service: but while those mercenary men get money by her shrines, they will keep up the cry "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" The Scriptures tell us that there is no work nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither we go; Eccl. ix. 10. that when the dust returns to its dust as it was, the spirit shall return to God who gave it; Eccl. xii. 7. The soul of the penitent thief was received to paradise, the same day of its disunion from his crucified body; and we are taught to believe, that there is no intermediate space between a wicked man's dying and his lifting up his eyes in hell-torments. So that although death does introduce all upon whom it passes into very different circumstances of happiness, or misery, to what they were in before, yet this is always agreeable to the state it finds them in: of which, when the decree has brought forth, and

the sentence is executed, there is no more possibility of change.

We laid this down as a principle, that many things in a parable are intended only to add to its beauty, and that it is sufficient in our interpretations, to attend to its scope: but the remark now made, enters into the very substance and design of this allegory. For if this part be looked upon as mere flourish, it will be hard to prove that the parable is instituted with any view to our instruction.

In this discourse we may inquire,

I. Into the account our Lord gives of their happiness, whom he shall find ready at his coming. It is said that they went with him to the marriage, and the door was shut.

II. Wherein this readiness consists. This readiness to meet Christ at death, and enter upon the possession of this happiness.

III. I will show you how warrantably we may look for this happiness, when thus disposed and prepared for the enjoyment of it.

The way will then be cleared to a practical application of this part of the subject.

I. We are to see what this happiness contains in it, which our Lord appropriates to such whom his coming shall find ready. He says, they that are ready go with him to the marriage, and the door is shut. And now, who would not die the death of the righteous, and have their latter end like his? How bright the scene which opens to

our view? How delightful! How full of glory! In the article of conversion, a kind of marriage-covenant commences between God and the soul. He mentions, with pleasure, the kindness of their youth, and love of their espousals; Jer. ii. 2. And to show that the choice is reciprocal, he leaves this on record as what is done on his part, I will *betroth* thee unto me for ever; yea, I will *betroth* thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. I will even *betroth* thee unto me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord. "Know that thy Redeemer is thy husband: the Lord of hosts is his name;" Hos. ii. 19, 20. We frequently find God setting himself forth in the Scriptures, as standing in this relation to his people. Accordingly the apostle Paul addresses the believing *Corinthians* in this strain: "I have espoused you to one HUSBAND that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ;" 2 Cor. xi. 2. The solemnizing the marriage rites (you see) is reserved to our arrival at a better world. And John tells us, that a voice from the excellent Glory, assured him of its consummation, upon our getting safe to heaven: his words are these; "I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, saying, Hallelujah: let us be glad, and rejoice, and give honour to God, for the *marriage* of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready. Blessed are they who are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb;" Rev. xix. 6, 7, 9. Our Lord chooses to represent

in my text, the blessedness of the righteous after death, in this attractive light.

The account he gives of this matter, contains in it the particulars that follow, viz. the magnificence that shall attend their entertainment in Heaven; the pure and perfect joys, which they shall there possess; and the immortal nature of their felicity, which is not only full beyond measure, but durable without end. The two first are included in the notion of their going with him to the marriage: the last is pointed at, when we are told that the door was shut.

1. The happiness of the saints in Heaven, is represented as most splendid and magnificent, when set forth under the allusion of their going in to the marriage. Whenever the Scriptures introduce the mention of the city of our God, they speak glorious things of her; Ps. lxxxvii. 3. How vastly pompous the portraiture given by St. John, when he says "the city is of pure gold, like to clear glass; the building of the wall of jasper, its foundation garnished with all manner of precious stones, the twelve gates, twelve pearls? the street of the city pure gold, as it were, transparent glass?" Rev. xxi. from the 18th. These rhetorical flights are designed to beget in the mind, the most lofty conceptions of the blessedness of the church of the first born, whose names are written in heaven. Accordingly, in proportion to the grandeur of the place, its entertainments are described as splendid

to a degree. What else can be aimed at, when their felicity above is called an exceeding and eternal weight of glory? their sitting upon thrones? their receiving an incorruptible crown, and a kingdom which cannot be moved? their being kings and priests unto God for ever? You see that their happiness is set off by images, taken from those things which among men, are most apt to impress the mind with a pleasing wonder: the things which we conceive to be the quintessence and perfection of worldly glory. And must it not be to fence us against any low thoughts of this afterstate, that it is said, eye hath not seen any thing that comes up to it? that it cannot be paralleled by any thing that ear has heard? that thought itself cannot reach the majesty of the subject? "for it has not entered into the heart of man to conceive, what God has laid up for such as love him."

And how properly is the allusion in my text made use of, for answering the same design? At a marriage solemnity all things are extraordinary grand; when it is a king, who enters into this new relation, what splendor, and magnificence, attend the nuptials? And since, in heaven, our Maker becomes our husband, and the glorification of the just is called a going in with him to the marriage: we do not take the idea that is designed to be conveyed to us by this figure, till we conceive somewhat august, pompous, majestic, in the blessedness of the saints above.

II. Entering with him into the marriage, instructs us further, of the unutterable joy that shall be upon our heads, when our warfare is accomplished; Isa. xxxv. 10. The Scriptures delight to speak of heaven, under this notion of it. Thus the psalmist; "there is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the most high;" Psal. xlvi. 4. and Psal. xvi. 11. In thy presence is fullness of joy, at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore. The same thing is referred to, when we are told, that in heaven all tears shall be wiped from our eyes, that sighing and sorrowing shall flee away, and our work there be one continued thank-offering.

Upon the occasion of a marriage, sadness of every sort gives way to a general joy: it is a kind of profanation of the sacred rites, when they are attended with an uncheerful aspect, especially if this should be the case upon the marriage of a king. Is not all this taken into our Saviour's reply, to the captious Pharisees? "Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast." It appears from hence, that when our Lord represents our going to Heaven, by our going to the marriage; he would have us to conceive of it, as entering into our master's joy: into a place where there is neither a weeping eye, nor a ruffled

breast; but every soul as full of pure and satisfying pleasure, as it can bear.

No wonder that this is the case with the saints above, if we remember such things as these.

(1.) There is the absence of whatever may unhinge the peace of our minds. Sin is the unhappy cause of what makes our tranquillity, while on earth, so shattered and inconstant. It has introduced all the evils which assault us from without, as well as the disorder and confusion in the faculties of the soul, which give those evils their sting; but we put off the body of sin, together with mortality, and become like the angels, in respect of purity, upon our reaching the seat of perfected spirits. The cause ceasing, the effect does necessarily cease. We know none of the melancholy fruits of sin, when we commence sinless. Now, how plainly does this further and enlarge our joy, to have the very temper of our minds moulded into the divine likeness? all our faculties thoroughly sanctified? every passion, affection, appetite in their primitive beauty? The eternal absence of sin being a kind of additional security to us, that they shall continue in the same comely order for ever; and so an invasion upon this peace, be for ever impossible.

(2.) In heaven we shall enjoy whatever is felicitating. The apostle speaking of our privileges at present, tells us we are heirs of God; hereafter, we shall be in possession of this incomprehensible

good. God himself will be our portion. Now, must not *their peace be as a river* and *their joy as a flood*, who being prepared by grace to relish such a happiness, do see his face, taste his love, enjoy intimate and uninterrupted communion with him, whose presence makes heaven to be a place of rest and bliss to all who people that glorious world? If the indistinct and short-lived visions of him, vouchsafed in this state of darkness, distance and minority, where our sanctification is imperfect, have put more joy into the heart, than *the increase of corn and wine*; sure their joy must be unspeakable when it is full of glory: when they no longer see darkly and through a glass, but face to face. Such revelations of himself having an assimilating, must also have a soul-satisfying virtue. Once more,

(3.) The blessed God does, in an immediate way, influence the happiness of glorified spirits; and no wonder that in heaven their joy is full. The pleasure must be great, which flows in upon the mind, when the soul reflects upon its own perfection, and sees itself possessed of such a goodly heritage. Very powerful the incentives to its peace and joy, both from within and from without; but what can be wanting to render these complete, when the God of peace says, *My peace give I unto you*, whose almighty word executes itself? what forbids our believing that he has this direct and positive influence upon the joy which abounds in

heaven, since all whom he makes meet for it, and translates thither, he does both for, with an eye to their being as happy as he himself can make them?

We say then that our Lord intimates there being somewhat grand in their circumstances, somewhat incomparably delightful and joyous, when he describes a Christian's getting to heaven by his going in to the marriage. We observed in this account,

3. That our Lord asserts the blessedness of the saints in heaven to be of an immortal nature. It is durable as it is joyous, and lasting as it is full. When they enter with him into their Father's house, the door is shut; that they may never be out of his sight, or from under the manifestations of his special love. Abraham is introduced as saying to the wicked rich man in hell, *Between us and you there is a great gulph fixed*, to cut off all communication. *They that are here cannot pass to you; neither can they pass to us who would come from thence*: Luke xvi. 26. Poor wretched creature, the door is shut, that all who come hither might be forever safe, and all who are with you excluded forever. It is worthy of himself for God to give his people eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is this that makes it an exceeding, its being an eternal weight of glory; Rom. vi. 23. 2 Cor. iv. 17. In heaven all wear unfading crowns; possess an inheritance that is incorruptible. Their city has foundations; their treasure is durable riches, and

an abiding substance. No fear of a *divorce*, when we are *married to the lamb*: *He has betrothed us to himself forever*. When he fulfils that covenant in heaven, it is with a design that nothing should violate or make it void throughout an endless eternity.

This shall suffice for the first head; under which we were to inquire into the account our Lord gives of their happiness, whom he shall find ready at his coming, when it is said that they went with him to the marriage, and the door was shut.

II. Let us now examine wherein this readiness to meet with Christ at death does consist. For it is observed of those, and only those who were ready, that they entered with him.

1. There is an habitual readiness to meet with Christ; and to this every real Christian has attained. This stands in our being in a converted and reconciled state; turned from darkness to light, and from Satan's power to God. And nothing less than this regeneration is sound Christianity. Faith discharges us from the curse and condemnation of the first, and interests us in the grace of the new, and better covenant. Nay, we become the children of God, through faith in Christ Jesus. When he has wrought this good thing in us, we may be said to have the root of the matter. We cannot totally and finally fall away. We are safe in point of eternal salvation, and in such a sense ready, as agrees not to any in a natural estate.

But beside this, there is also,

2. An actual preparedness for the coming of our Lord. This is every Christian's duty and it is a commendable ambition to be incessantly pressing after it. Without this, we may die safely, die in the Lord, but we cannot die joyfully. Though it is not absolutely necessary to our reaching Heaven, yet it is to our having an abundant entrance administered to us.

There are at least these three things required, to make up the actual preparation for death, of which we speak.

I. A regular indifferency and mortification to the present world. Christ observed to us, that a being overcharged with the cares of this life, is what may happen to one who has the grace of God; and yet it effectually disqualifies those to whom it may be applied, for a comfortable meeting with him. See the forementioned Luke xxi. 34. This excessive anxiety about temporal things arises from an inordinate love of, and desire after them; so that he must escape this snare, who treats the world with jealousy and caution, and knows how to use, without abusing it. Paul was come a great length, when Christ's cross had crucified him to the world, and the world to him. This helped to that resolution and firmness of mind, with which he spoke of his being ready to be offered up; made absence from the body more eligible than abiding in the flesh; and inspired him with a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, as what was best of all.

The larger the share which this world, and the things of it, have in our hearts, the less entertainment shall we experience upon the subject of dying; and that man will find it very hard work to die, who has lived an utter stranger even to the thoughts of it. He that would be ready to meet Death at the first summons, must use himself to think of what it is, and does. By dying daily, we learn to die well.

2. There is supposed in order to this readiness to meet Christ, that our affections are set upon things above, and our conversations in Heaven. We must have grace, which is not only genuine as to its kind, but improved and advanced as to its measure and degree, not to look at what is seen, and temporal, but *unseen and eternal things*. There are undoubtedly some such, whose hearts and thoughts centre where their treasure is laid up. And as nothing will make this earth more contemptible, than our living in the upper glorious world; so nothing will make converse with death less unpleasant, or more refreshing. Temptations come with great disadvantage, to one who thus lives with God. The prospect of death is delightful, as it finishes a sinning and sorrowing condition, and is the dawn of an everlasting day of rest and blessedness.

To this actual preparation for dying, is required,

3. A daily expectation of our Lord's approach. The apostle Peter makes this a sort of abridgment of the Christian's life, that it is "a looking for, and

hasting unto Christ's coming ;" 2 Pet. iii. 12. He who would then be found unto praise, must keep his lamp trimmed, his loins girt, governing himself in his general walk under the force of this thought, at an hour which I know not, my Lord will come. Some sudden fits of seriousness, now and then to think of dying, and attempt to reconcile ourselves to it ; this is not the actual readiness of which we speak. In order to this, progress in sanctification must be our daily study and endeavour : and it must appear through our whole lives, that we are waiting for an event that may surprise ere we are aware. And how very happy his circumstances, whom this day shall overtake in such an employment ? what anticipations of celestial bliss will his soul taste, before it has reached Emmanuel's land ?

But we shall have occasion to enter further into these things, when speaking to the fifth proposition. These general suggestions may serve for the present.

We come now to the third head proposed to be spoken to : to show you how warrantably we look for the happiness of which our Lord speaks, when we are thus prepared for the enjoyment of it. Expect that if ready at his coming, we shall go with him into the marriage. It might be said

1. That things cannot take another turn, but the righteousness of God will fail. When the great apostle Paul had said, " I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith," he

adds, "henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." And he argues his security as to the event, from the consideration of the righteousness of God: 'The Lord, the RIGHTEOUS Judge, will give it me, says he; because God is righteous, I am safe. And you may observe, that he disclaims this as a personal privilege, that was confined to the Apostolical character; assuring all who had imitated him in his duty as a Christian, that God allowed them to urge the same plea. The righteous judge will give it, not to me only, but to all them also who love his appearing; 2 Tim. iv. 7,

8. Though I may reckon myself among the chief of sinners, yet have I obtained mercy; the blessing I expect, though exceedingly abundant above what I can think, was purchased at the expense of my Saviour's blood, for penitents, returning, believing sinners, such as by a patient continuance in well-doing look for it: of this number am I, by the rich and free grace of God, and it consists not with the righteousness of the divine nature, to withhold the blessing so dearly bought by their surety, from those whom his own almighty grace has formed and fashioned into a meetness for the enjoyment of it. I know that there can be no unrighteousness with God; and since justice to his Son, requires his being gracious to his seed, I am sure of glory, as it sat down already in the heavenly places. Again,

2. The faithfulness of God is a superadded en-

couragement to us, when we are looking for eternal life as his gift. We cannot suppose that he made known so many great and precious promises, as run through the revelation he has given us, with a view to the disappointing the hopes raised by them in the minds of his people. "He is not man, that he should lie, nor the son of man, that he should repent." He abideth faithful; and though the heavens and earth should pass away, one tittle that he has said shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. The apostle Paul concludes the Christian's safety from this very perfection of God's nature; let us (says he) hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, and continue to draw near to God with a true heart, and in full assurance of faith; for he is faithful that promised. That promised what? That promised we should "ere long reap, if we fainted not; and if we endured to the end, should be saved: Heb. x. 22, 23. If we should miscarry at last, then God would be unfaithful to his word; but since such a weakness is impossible to him, we should cherish a lively hope, and rejoice in the prospect of the approaching glory of God.

3. The sanctifying work of the Spirit upon the soul, does further warrant us in these expectations. He is called by the apostle, "the earnest of the inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession," 2 Cor. v. 5. Eph. i. 14. Lest we should think God's word too slender a security, he

puts as it were a pledge into our hands. When he sends the spirit of his Son into the hearts of his children, he says to them, here is a pledge I lodge with you, that you may have no doubts as to my fulfilling the covenant which is between us; take this spirit as an earnest of what is behind. Every wise man works with a view to a certain end, but did God fit a soul for Heaven, and afterward deny it admission there, this would be to act without an end; or in a very solemn manner to beget and carry on hopes, which he knew would make us ashamed.

In short, Christ has died in vain, in vain is the mission, and various influences of the Spirit, if sanctification and glorification have not an inviolable and necessary dependance on each other. The whole gospel is a mere fiction, if such as are ready for Christ's coming, go not with him in to the marriage.

What is the issue of things with an unprepared person, I shall consider in the next discourse, from that part of the parable, which tells us, that the foolish virgins were shut out, and knocked without having admission for ever. They go into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.

Let us apply what has now been said.

1. We may learn from hence, that it is active, painful, fruitful, persevering Christianity, and that only, which shall be followed with the *gift of eternal life*. It is not enough that we set out in the

Spirit, and for a season run well. We must lead the whole of that life, which we live in the flesh, by the faith of the Son of God, if we would so run, as at length to receive the prize. Amidst the crowd of such who pass for his disciples, how few have thus learned Christ? How very many that conform to this world, instead of being transformed into the spirit of the religion which they profess! Their conversation is as earthly and sensual as if they had never set their faces heavenward. O with what confusion will Christ's coming fill such inconstant, careless, temporizing Christians, whose goodness has proved *like the morning cloud and early dew, which pass away!* And may not their joy be as the joy of harvest, who have been enabled to abide with him in all his temptations, through good report and ill report, following the Lamb, and to their death not removing from them their integrity? The time of their death will be a time of refreshment from the presence of the Lord. The very glimmers of that inaccessible light, which is breaking in upon them, will scatter the darkness of the grave, and both guide and comfort them when they are to pass through it; they shall have everlasting arms underneath them, and a glorious escape out of all their trials: for verily there is a rest that remains for the people of God.

2. Let us improve the joy set before us, as a motive to greater fervency in spirit, when we are serving the Lord. It is a shame, Christians, not to

run with full consent the ways of God's commandment, when so truly noble is the *prize of your high calling in Christ Jesus*. It is undervaluing your Father's love, your Saviour's purchase, and writing Ichabod upon the entertainment and felicity of the angels of light. Pray for the increase of that faith which is the evidence of things not seen; keep a fixed eye upon the recompense of reward; this will establish and strengthen you, that you will not grow weary or faint in your mind; it will make life easy and useful, and prevent any hurtful surprises by death: thus shall ye grow white to the harvest; and though you *went forth weeping, bearing your precious seed, ye shall doubtless return rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you*.

For setting this home upon the conscience, it might be said,

(1.) That God *expected* it should inspire our obedience, when he drew aside the veil, and disclosed the glories of the better world. His authority, as our sovereign, makes his will our duty; and without any of the *encouragements* he has given us, it would have been criminal to trifle in the work of the Lord. But did he give such matter for our hopes to feed upon, without an answerable expectation of fruit? When he takes us up to Pisgah, and thence furnishes a prospect of the land of promise, it is to inflame our desires, give us fresh life and vigour in duty, that we might mend our pace, and take straight steps to the world of vision. While

heaven has not this influence upon you, Christian, you answer not the design of God, in bringing it to light.

(2.) If you are not thus animated by the views of heaven, you will experience but little of the Christian's peace either in life or death. The more eminent our obedience, the more abundant in proportion our joy. And shall we willingly obstruct the growth and increase of that peace which the world cannot give, nor take away from us? Think oftener of heaven, and you will love it; remember it as the residence of God, the judge of all, and Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, as the place of your birth, and of your rest. You will find enough in these thoughts to make you patient in suffering, and cheerful in doing the will of God; and so to fit you for that blessed eternal world.

## SERMON V.

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THE UNREADY AT DEATH, LOST FOR EVER.

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DEATH fixes our condition for eternity; there is no work in the grave: such as are ready at his coming, Christ takes with him to the marriage. Their after-state is grand and joyous, and commensurate in its duration, to the immortality of those spirits that can never die. When *received up into glory, the door is shut*, to intimate their safety in these circumstances, and the impossibility of their losing their present happiness for ever. Beside, an habitual readiness, which consists in our being born again, and is strictly necessary to our dying in safety; there is such a thing as actual preparation attainable, and it is this that makes our latter end peace. All whom his grace has made ready for his coming, have heaven secured to them, by the righteousness of God, his faithfulness. They have a pledge and earnest of this given them, in the renewing and sanctifying presence of the holy Ghost.

But when we say that it is to fare with us to eternity, according to the state and condition

Christ finds us in at his coming, this is not to be restrained to the Christian.

In the following discourse we will consider this remark as it respects a wicked person, whom Christ's coming by death shall find altogether unprepared; a hypocrite, who had a lamp, but no oil in his vessel. Our Lord tells us what the issue of things will be with the foolish virgins, as well as the wise; when the *bridegroom came*, says he, *such as were ready went in with him to the marriage*; the rest were shut out; and all the return they meet with upon their importunate applications for entrance is this, "depart from me, I know you not." You have been traitors under a colour of friendship; and being filthy, be ye filthy still.

In pursuing this observation we will speak to the following heads:

I. Prove the remark to be just and defensible, when we say, that such, whom Christ's coming by death shall find unprepared, shall be dealt with accordingly in the next world.

II. Inquire into the account which our Lord gives us of their after state, when he tells us, that the door is shut against them, and professes, upon their entreating mercy *I know you not*.

III. Show that it is every way consistent with the perfection of the divine nature, that matters should go on in this order. We will then see,

IV. How this part of the subject may be most profitably applied, in reference to practice.

I. We are to prove that this observation is just, viz. That all such, whom the coming of Christ by death shall find unready, shall have their everlasting condition issued accordingly. The un readiness of which we now speak, is not merely the want of an actual preparation for death, as that is opposed to an habitual preparation; but the entire unfitness both as to habit and act, which is every man's case in an unregenerate state. Such as are unarmed against the sting of death, which is the undischarged guilt of sin, and remain under the penal law or curse, which is sin's condemning strength, are in all respects unprovided for Christ's coming; 1 Cor. xv. 56. If death arrests us in a natural state, it finds us under all the ruins of the apostacy; and upon the foot of the first and broken covenant and dying in our sins, we shall be treated for ever as hypocrites and unbelievers. Repentance is not a grace in the next world, but a punishment. When Christ says, *blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted*; in limiting the promise to the repentance that is exercised in our trial state, he assures us, that hereafter *it shall find no room, though sought bitterly and with tears*; Matt. v. 4. compared with Heb. xii. 17. Repentance after death, is an ingredient in our misery, not a qualification for pardon and acceptance.

Observe, we do not say but that late repentance may be saving, though it is difficult to know whether it is genuine and sincere, when thus late; but we

say of such, as under a profession of religion, die in a state of infidelity, death will make no alteration in their souls' state, as guilty, undone creatures : but as they finish their trial state, it shall fare with them in the world of retributions. I hinted before, that the doctrine of purgatory was a novel invention, the reverse of the doctrine of the Bible ; an insult upon the Redeemer's mediatorial character : and that if good men had more, either to do or bear, previous to their investiture in the happiness of heaven, upon their being discharged from this world and body ; or if hypocrites, when this life ended, were put under a new dispensation of the grace of God, the Scriptures would mislead us, in representing the present as the only state of trial. It shall suffice, that I show you what foundation our general remark has in the Scriptures ; for I aim at their conviction only, who will be determined by this authority.

I take this to be referred to, in the message which the prophet Isaiah tells us he had in commission from the Lord of hosts, to deliver. His words are these, "say to the righteous it shall be well with him, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him ;" Isa. iii. 10, 11. In this world, where all things fall out alike to all, the good man attains not to the happiness, nor is the wicked man overtaken by the full woe intended him. We must suppose the prophet

to have looked beyond this life and world, and his sense to be much like what these words of the apostle intimate, when he says, "be not deceived, God is not mocked; for what a man sows, it is that he shall also reap: he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting:" Gal. vi. 7, 8. There is another passage in the writings of this apostle, which says as much as we can desire, upon this head: We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad; 2 Cor. v. 10. There will be no fresh trial made of us in the next world, nor will the multiplicity of affairs to be inspected in the Judgment occasion any mistake in the administration. God will not forget which was almost, and which altogether a Christian, and so change their portions; but what a man was found to be at death, that he shall appear to be, at the judgment, and be treated to eternity as he was ready, or unready, when his Lord came. If you compare the 23d and 24th verses of the 16th of Luke, you will find that the first carries us to the grave of that hard-hearted miser treated of in that chapter: and the very next to the hell, where the ungodly appear. He died a Christless creature; and though there was a change in his circumstances, upon his receiving the wages of sin, yet there was no alteration in the afterstate of his

soul. The foolish virgins, mentioned in my text, were for making some sort of provision for death, when they found that they could live no longer; though they were fundamentally defective in their preparations, and being caught unready, there is no other time or place for getting the necessary preparedness. They are shut out, and entrance into Heaven is denied them for ever.

What is included in the account which our Lord gives of their future state, who lived and died Christian infidels, is the second particular, we promised to inquire into. Indeed, this is rather a negative description of their condition after death, than a direct and positive one: it rather points at what they shall suffer: but we may conclude that the positive part of their punishment is intended, when the negative part only is expressed. This rule must be admitted, or we shall but lamely interpret many important articles, in the revelation God has given us. You know that five out of six commandments, which include the duties of the second table, are negative precepts; though they are allowed to enjoin the duties, which are the reverse of the sins they prohibit: and this remark will hold good in many other instances.

I will give you this short view of their case in the next world, whom Christ shall find unready, at his coming to them, by death.

1. They shall be excluded Heaven, and whatever is entertaining there. They are represented,

as saying, Lord, open to us; to let us know, that when these foolish virgins came looking for mercy, the door was shut. Heaven is called the inheritance of the Saints; Col. 1. 12. *i. e.* as the same apostle explains it, the inheritance of them that are sanctified; Act. xx. 32. This holy city is so appropriated to the use and entertainment of such as are perfect in holiness, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor can corruption inherit incorruption; 1 Cor. xv. 50. These words refer more immediately to the natural incapacity of even the believer himself, till he receives a spiritual body, for what is seen, done, and enjoyed above; yet it is strictly true, in regard to the moral incapacity of a hypocrite: for flesh and blood do usually describe human nature in its unregenerate condition. Now, how distressful the case, that when the soul is driven from all that was desirable to it upon earth, it should find the gate of paradise (the seat of light, and life and love and joy) guarded by a flaming sword, to render it inaccessible! to be exiled from that presence that is to eternity a spring of new and satisfying delights, to the glorified multitude! and ever feel the resistless force of this prohibition, in reference to every part of their felicity, "touch not, taste not, handle not"! especially remembering that there is no middle world between Heaven and Hell; but all such to whom this light is unapproachable, are overwhelmed with outer darkness.

With what horror and anguish will it fill conscience, when the mind shall be hurried with such reflections as these? It was my keeping up a show of Christianity, will the soul say, while I was heedless and indifferent about the *thing*, that has lost me this Heaven, and thus confounded and disappointed my hopes. This is what I talked of, and pretended to seek in the first place, but practically made light of it: and now, when every place beside, is the habitation of cruelty, full of sorrow and pain, and no where else that I can find rest for the sole of my foot, I am judged unworthy of the kingdom of heaven. If I had been, and done, what I was willing the world should believe, that I was, and did, my condition had now been easy, as it is distracting: but to have exchanged these joys, that glory; a happiness so full, suitable, satisfying, for these horrors, this disgrace, misery, damnation, how prodigious the folly! These thoughts are worms, fire, whips, scorpions, they enrage, and torment. They must do so, for conscience is now roused, and let loose as an executioner of divine vengeance.

To aggravate this unhappiness, I observe,

2. From the account given in my text, that prayers and tears shall be ineffectual, for the least alleviation of their doom. They called him *Lord, Lord!* though they *did not the things which he said*: and here are they introduced, as pleading their knowledge of the Judge, and soliciting with the most passionate earnestness, that their banishment

may not be everlasting: yet they sue, and cry in vain. If you compare vii Mat. 21, 22, 23. with the xiii Luke. from the 25. (in which passages you have a general view of the Judgment) you will find that our Lord mentions several other pleas, that will be urged upon that awful occasion. There is an obvious gradation in their arguments; and each supplicant seems to offer somewhat more strong in his favor, than the other, as he has his turn to plead. Says one, Lord, I lived under the sound of thy gospel, thou hast taught in our streets: let this prevail for the showing me mercy. Says another, I bore thy name, and was in possession of all the privileges of thine house: *he says that thou hast taught in his streets*; but I can say more, for I have *eaten and drunk in thy presence*. Says a third, I not only bore the title of a Christian, but was honoured with the character of a minister. I have prophesied in thy name. A fourth carries the point yet further: *I had the faith of miracles, in thy name have cast out devils and done many wonderful works*. Each of them advance their pleas in bar of the perpetuity of their misery; that if the door should continue shut for a while, it might not be shut so, as to be opened no more for ever. But we find that the Judge is unmoved at their most earnest entreaties, and the same tremendous sentence determines their common doom: "depart from me." Pursuant to this, the apostle John tells us, that *into the new Jerusalem, in no wise en-*

ters any thing that defileth ; Rev, xxi. 27. in no wise, not though they should weep, as it were, drops of blood to the ground ; in the most affecting manner possible, beseech and plead. The Judge is inexorable, and the sentence must take place in the whole of its comprehensive woe ; and is it not dreadful in the very mention ? for it runs thus, *depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels ;* Mat. xxv. 41, 46. The apostle to the Thessalonians says, that all such who obey not the gospel of Christ, shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord ; 2 Thess. i. 8, 9. There is no retreating from God's essential presence ; such as have their bed in hell, find him there : but they lose God's presence, as a refreshing light, to bear it for ever, as a consuming fire. They are now, "where the worm dies not, and where the fire is not quenched."

3. It is further intimated in my text, as to the future state of hypocritical professors, that they shall be under immediate impressions of divine wrath, which is the compliment of the second death. When he says, I know you not, this respects not any defect in our Redeemer's knowledge, for he knows all things ; but an eternal suspension of his favor from these lost creatures. Nay, it is, I know you not, as filled with bowels of mercy, but the terrors of incensed justice ; not as a Saviour, but as an avenger. And if the felicity of

glorified spirits is influenced by the immediate impressions they receive from the Father of lights; what forbids our supposing that damnation receives its full emphasis, from as immediate impressions of divine wrath? This is not obscurely delivered by the prophet Isaiah, xxx. Chap. 33. where he tells us, that Tophet is ordained of old, that it is deep, and large: the pile thereof, fire and much wood; and that the *breath of the Lord*, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it. But it is abundantly plain, from those passages in which the misery of the damned is summed up in this, the *wrath of God does abide upon them*. This is expressly asserted, John iii. 36. To be eternally deprived of God's loving-kindness, does constitute a state that is truly and properly wretched: to be haunted eternally with the rebukes, and condemnings of an angry breast, heats the furnace some degrees hotter: but if the psalmist could say, who felt them in measure, "while I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted;" what is their case, upon whom vengeance is come to the uttermost; upon whose head, whole vials of wrath are poured forth? To whom are wrung out the very dregs of the cup of trembling and astonishment? To have an everlasting day of wrath, and fresh revelations of this wrath everlasting, carries in it the idea of a wretchedness that is complete.

All this is included in our Saviour's saying "I know you not;" that is, I do not so know you, as to show you any mercy: I do not know you so as to

abate in any instance, my resistless almighty vengeance. Let me now, in the,

III. Show you how consistent it is with the perfection of the divine nature, that things should proceed in this method. For illustrating this point let me say,

(1.) It is every way worthy of God, thus to shut out of Heaven, all such who practically refused it. In his word he has given us a sketch of that Heaven, which, is the habitation of his holiness and glory; not merely to excite our wonder, but provoke our desires; for he offers, and in a covenant way secures this, to all, who by a patient continuance in well doing, look for it. Now, however lavish a man may be in his commendations of that distant invisible good, if the consent of his will is never gained for God, if he yields not the obedience of faith, if he does not thankfully and cheerfully look for Heaven, in the gospel way, it is fairly imputed to him that he refuses it. And does it break in upon the glory of divine wisdom? or throw the least dishonour upon either the goodness, or justice of God, to accept the refusal? That the profane person should be rejected, who, afterwards, would inherit the blessings, which he had sold for a morsel of meat? Heb. xii. 16, 17. When our Lord shall be able to say to those formal professors, "ye would not come to me, that ye might have life;" with the utmost safety to all the excellencies of his nature, he may say further, I forbear any more

tenders of this undervalued blessing, and you shall never see life. I forbid you the Heaven, which you now seek as a shelter from Hell; but slighted when proposed, as the seat of sinless purity, and the residence of God. The righteousness of this sentence, will be applauded by angels and men.

For the further illustration of this, I add,

2. It cannot be injurious to any of the divine perfections, that such should be sent to hell, who have freely chosen it.

It may be said, that upon the supposition of any man's making such a preposterious choice, being considered as a reasonable and free creature, and in a state of probation,—this would obviate all difficulties arising in prejudice of the divine administration, though God should thus issue things, in reference to this particular man. But there are not any instances of human nature being thus far abandoned; it is begging the question, to say that they choose hell, and have the part they choose.

I answer, in God's way of interpreting things, (and this must determine the case,) he supposes that there is a language in our actions, which is expressive and intelligible. Accordingly, God makes that man to be guilty in the present instance, who may not have directly and intentionally resolved on so wild a choice. To support this assertion, I will show you that this is a ruled case; look to Prov. viii. 36. "He that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul; all they that hate me,

love death. Death is not formally and intentionally the object of their love, but interpretatively it is: for he may be said to love and choose the end, who loves and chooses the means, which stand in a natural and necessary connection with it. Now, when this is not said *in a corner* but *upon a housetop*, when God has left it upon record, for the information of each successive generation of men, that he will proceed according to this rule, in the judgment he issues concerning them; this fastens the guilt, makes it still more plainly a matter of choice, to the desperate creature who undoes himself. Having *set life and death before us, blessing and cursing*; is it unworthy of God, to give us the part we have freely chosen? Again,

If the objection be started upon the foot of the eternity of the sinner's punishment, and the righteousness of God be challenged upon the apprehended disproportion between the penalty and the offence; what has been said already is a sufficient reply. For if I choose sin, when forbidden upon the pain of everlasting damnation, it is plain that I choose that everlasting damnation; and then the matter runs to this again, viz. whether it is unworthy of a righteous God to give a free creature the part he chooses? But further,

We do allow that to be equal among men, which we brand with the infamous imputation of unrighteousness in God. Treason may be perpetrated in an instant, and yet by the law, the traitor is never

to recover the life which he has hereby forfeited. Nay, his blood is not accounted an equivalent to his crime, but *his children's teeth are set on edge by the grapes which he has eaten.* God himself tells us, that he renders to every man according to his works. There can therefore be no erring from the rules of justice in his administration. And until we can comprehend the infinite majesty of God, the infinite purity and righteousness of his law, his absolute propriety in his creatures, we cannot form adequate conceptions of sin's malignity; and even upon this account run a bold venture in saying, that its punishment is unequal to its guilt. Upon the whole,

God has threatened sin with everlasting punishment; and admitting for argument's sake, that we could not account for this, we deserve not the name of Christians, if this alone could not satisfy, viz. that there can be no unrighteousness with him.

IV. We are now to apply this discourse, which was the last head proposed. And,

1. What terror does this doctrine speak to such, who under a profession of religion, are strangers to the grace of God. "The sinners in Zion may be afraid, and fearfulness seize the hypocrite in heart, for who of them can dwell with the devouring fire? who among them dwell with everlasting burnings?" Isa. xxxiii. 14. How justly is destruction from God a terror to such? Job. xxxi. 23. He says, "Behold all ye who kindle a fire, that

compass yourselves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall you have of mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow:" Isa. l. 11.

That you may be rightly affected with your own case, let the following particulars be allowed a place in your thoughts.

1. Think what it is you put to the hazard, by your insincerity in the great affair of religion. The stake is nothing less than heaven, that undefiled and incorruptible inheritance, beyond which our minds can conceive nothing that is either great or delightful. God requires you to seek this kingdom in the *first place*. Not only to set about it early in life, but with a most intense application. Why? because the chief good challenges our principal regard. But you reject the counsel of God against yourselves. And when your spirits are dispossessed of their present habitation, to have no heaven to entertain them, how very unhappy such a circumstance? To be friendless upon your launching into the eternal world of spirits, and find a despised heaven barred against you forever, the character you now bear, the privileges you now enjoy, vainly pleaded; O can you think of this being your own case, and not cry out, *Wretched man that I am?* Think,

2. For what it is that you put such things as these in jeopardy. To act up to your character as rational, you should give the preference to the

best things: those that are most worthy in themselves, and most necessary to your happiness. One would think that to satisfy conscience, you should make it appear that they are trifles which you hazard, if compared with the part you choose. This would justify the conduct, and nothing less can do it. Well, let us set the things you secure by a profession, against those that you hazard by being only professors; and then see how the account will stand. By your profession you are supposed to have life; by being only professors, you continue under the power of death. By your profession you make up a fictitious peace; by a mere profession forfeit the peace of God. By your profession, you may get more of this world; by insincerity in that profession, you lose life everlasting. You hazard the approbation of God, for the applause of men; a real for an imaginary peace; heaven for earth. Whether this be acting circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, judge ye. Think,

3. What are the positive evils to which you lay yourself open by such a conduct. A real Christian is blessed in life, and death, and forever; a hypocrite lives and dies under the character of a child of wrath, and is to be a victim to divine vengeance to eternity. Christ pronounces him accursed when he sentences him to depart, to intimate that he is so at present, and to make him eminently so forever. Do not flatter yourself that

hell is a painted fire, its tortures visionary, or that the mercy of God will overrule your punishment, so as that it shall be less intense or durable. This is imputing to him a weakness; an insult upon his faithfulness, his justice, and the immutability of his nature. Now, do you not only make a forfeiture of heaven, but a purchase of hell, by a profession that is separated from practical Christianity? And ought ministers to soften or conceal the terror that belongs to you? Can they do it without treacherously keeping back from you part of the counsel of God?

(2.) If it is to fare with the sinner to all eternity, according to the state of his soul at death, then as we dread everlasting destruction, and desire immortal blessedness, let us lay a good foundation against the time to come. It should fill us with the praises of our God, that he has not cut short his work in righteousness with us, that it is still the *accepted time, and the day of salvation; today, while it is called today, if we harden not our hearts.* But if we continue in sin, while this grace does abound towards us, this will be resented as a despising God's patience and forbearance, and we shall treasure up wrath against the day of wrath. Let us follow God with our strong cries, resolve to give him no rest day or night, till he shall receive us graciously, love us freely, form Christ within us, and possess us of the spirit of his Son. Till this is our case, our life is a dream, and we are very

unfit to die. If we have a concern of heart about this matter, are humbled to the dust at God's feet, that we have been so long *cumberers of the ground*, if we continue to have such an anxiety and solicitude about pure and undefiled religion; he that brought us to the self-same thing is God. Our willing as well as doing aright, we owe to his good pleasure. We may look upon what his hand has already wrought, as a token for good, as a pledge of further and greater blessings: that in inclining our hearts to seek, he has done it with a design of attending to the voice of our supplication, that he might not spare his Son, and with him might freely give us all things.

I would recommend this advice by the following motives. They will have their weight, if duly considered.

1. Consider how very soon death may overtake you. We are all tenants at will, are turned out at the pleasure of the great Lord of life. It is at our peril that we postpone this affair, and say to it, *Go thy way for the present, at a more convenient season we will send for thee.* Nay, this is invading the divine prerogative, *For it is not for us to know the times and seasons; this the Father hath reserved in his own power.* And to check presumption of this kind, we are told that we cannot so much as say *what shall be on the morrow.* Shall a moment be lost then, when our salvation depends upon the right improvement of life; and of this whole life

we are not able to call any more than the present NOW our own? Consider,

2. That your neglecting this call which God has given you, may make your death less easy, and your account more dreadful. Should you stifle any convictions which may have broken in upon your minds, by the blessing of God upon what you have now heard; forbear to put in execution the purposes formed in favour of God, and your souls, as you do the devil the greatest pleasure, so you may find when death comes, that you have doubly armed that *King of terrors*. As your guilt will be hereby aggravated, so your condemnation will be more severe in the next world.

You are invited to serve yourselves, to provide against the most shocking extremities; I have been endeavouring to help your hope and joy: but we must leave them in God's hands, to make what has been delivered *the words of eternal life*.

## SERMON VI.

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HIDING OUR DEATH, A CALL TO WATCHFULNESS.

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WE are to stand or fall forever, as ready or unready at Christ's coming. The Christian passes by death into fulness of joy; hypocrites suffer by death the punishment of loss, and the punishment of sense; miss heaven, and are cast into the lake of fire. Enlarging on these heads, lets us into the subject contained in the fourth proposition.

There is one more behind, which may profitably employ our present thoughts. It is this:—

*Prop. V.* That our being left in the dark about the time of our death, and the Judgment day, when assured of the certainty of both, should be a sufficient motive to our watchfulness, that we may be found in peace. Our Lord infers this as a conclusion naturally arising from the main doctrine treated of in the preceding parable: *Watch, therefore, for ye know not either the day or the hour, wherein the Son of man cometh.*

What man can believe that there is an event before him, in which the welfare of a soul for eternity is concerned, one that is infallibly certain, and cannot but come to pass, may take place the next year, or month, or week, or day, or hour, or

moment, and which of them a secret to him; what man thinks, (with this state of the case in his view) who must not own that the advice carries strength and propriety in it, when he is put upon a constant expectation of what may overtake him in an instant? It is giving up the character of a man and a Christian at once; and offering violence to the light of reason as well as revelation, to refuse being determined by such evidence as this.

In the further prosecution of this doctrine, I shall endeavour,

I. To explain the nature of this duty, for the more effectual recommendation of which, this parable is instituted by our Lord.

II. Show you the force of this reasoning, when this duty is urged from the consideration of the Son of man's coming *in a day, and at an hour that we know not of.*

III. Offer something for vindicating the Divine conduct, in thus hiding from us the time of our death. We shall then add,

IV. Such practical reflections as may be a fit close to this subject.

I. Let us inquire into the nature of this duty, with a view to the recommending which, our Saviour institutes this parable. To proceed with greater clearness, suffer me to reassume this one observation, viz. That as in the chapter before my text, Christ had been pressing watchfulness upon his disciples, as that was opposed to intemperance, the giving into luxury, and a brutish in-

dulgence of the passions and appetites; so in this chapter he inculcates the same duty, but taken in opposition to security, and as consisting in a readiness to meet him at his coming. If you compare what occurs from the thirty seventh verse of the foregoing chapter, with what is offered in the thirteenth verse of this chapter, in its connexion with the context, you will see that there is room for this distinction. This duty was not limited in its obligation to the disciples of our Lord, no, nor to such as were Israelites according to the flesh, but equally concerns all who have heard of his name, and are begotten to the hope of Christ's second coming. This scripture is not of private interpretation; but what is said to one, is said to all of us, *watch*.

There are these two things supposed in the watchfulness which my text mentions, *viz.* our avoiding whatever either in the way of amusement, or incumbrance, may make us unready for the coming of our Lord; and the exercising ourselves to whatever may forward our preparedness to meet him.

In the watchfulness which my text mentions, here is supposed,

(1.) Our avoiding whatever either as an amusement or incumbrance may make us less ready for our Lord's coming. Considering our present circumstances and situation, as spirits in flesh, surrounded with so great a variety of objects, which by the senses gain admittance to the heart, it be-

comes us to fear always. Without this guard upon ourselves, it will be next to impossible not to run into such an intimacy with this world, as will prejudice our correspondence with a better; and to get into that way of living, which will hazard our dying in peace. He who made this world, and perfectly knows the power of things present to ensnare corrupt nature, has often cautioned us to be upon our watch, if we would not be overcome by evil. This restraint upon us, flows from the infiniteness of wisdom and goodness there is in God, and is by no means an act of absolute sovereignty.

I shall instance in two particulars, whence good men are in danger of being unready for Christ's coming; against both which they should exercise themselves to this watchfulness. The

1. Launching out into a sort of boundless pursuit of the world. There is a great deal of danger from unblest prosperity. A man of vast discernment, among other remarks he had made upon the ordinary course of things, observes to have seen riches given to the owners of them to their hurt. I said, unblest or unsanctified prosperity, for neither love nor hatred is to be known by these things under the sun; Eccl. ix. 1. When riches increase, men are apt to set their hearts upon them; to pull hard, when they find that the world is coming; and spread all their sails, while the wind is favourable. So true is it, that they who love silver, are not satisfied with silver; or he that loveth abundance, with increase: Eccl. v. 10. How many

think, and plod, and hurry, and labor, bereaving their souls of good, whose pretence, should you caution them against overdoing the matter, amounts only to this, viz. They are providing for their families, and by their present assiduity striving to get the sooner through this fatiguing way of life? However plausible this excuse may appear upon the first hearing, yet if we weigh it in our thoughts, and remember that no employment of life is justifiable, which hinders the principal design of life, unfits us for dying, and entering triumphantly into Heaven; it will be judged weak and trifling.

I may show you without difficulty, that while we conduct ourselves thus, we must be unavoidably entangled; our spiritual affairs suffering in proportion to our over-concern for temporal things. For,

1. We must of necessity, by such a respect for this world, often break in upon the time which we owe to better things. There needs no laboured proof of this remark, the truth of which is attested by experience. Granting that such a care for my family as to temporals, does not wholly divert the care I should take of their souls, that mine is not a prayerless house, notwithstanding this crowd of business (and would to God that this might be safely allowed as to all professing families) there is much more than this, which is my daily duty as a Christian. For instance, serious self-reflection, going into mine own heart, comparing what I have been and done the day that is past, with that perfect rule, to which both heart and actions should

be conformed: conversing with Heaven in private; our native soil, our Father's house. There are many things which may not be properly communicated to a family, that must not be forgotten when God and the soul are together. These are not left to our courtesy, to be done or forborne at our pleasure: they are duties which we owe, and God expects. Now, as far as this eager prosecution of the world, and embarking thus extravagantly in its affairs, rob us of the time which such services as these do require; so far are we hereby rendered less ready for our Lord's coming. The laying aside such a weight, the avoiding such an incumbrance, must in course be referred to, in the watchfulness here recommended. Christ himself explains it thus, when he sets it in opposition to such an overchargedness with the cares of this life, as renders it but too possible for that day *to come upon us unawares*. And I take the apostle Paul to have had the same sense of things, when he makes watchfulness and sobriety to be terms of the same import. As does also the apostle Peter. Compare 1 Thes. v. 6. with 1 Pet. iv. 7. The sobriety of which they both speak, intimates Moderation and Temperance in our regards for these present perishing things.

2. As such a concern for this world should be avoided upon the account of the encroachments it makes on the time which we owe to better things, it should also as it indisposes the mind for entertainments that are spiritual and divine. Thus does

it further unfit us for Christ's coming. We must not only see that duty is done, but make conscience of the manner of doing it, if we would thrive in grace and comfort. An action that is materially good, may be circumstantially evil. If it do not spring from a right principle, if it is not regular in its aims, and directed to the proper end (and these things fall under the divine cognizance) the service may be condemned of God, which meets with the universal applause of men. It is not enough that I confess the sins of the day, if I experience not the workings of gospel repentance; that I acknowledge the personal and relative blessings conferred, if my heart is unaffected with the bounty of Heaven; that I talk of my grave, if I die not to this world, as I am dying out of it; or the glories of Heaven, if I feel not the powers of the world to come. Now, admitting that the man, whose life is such a continued hurry, does reserve some of his time for God; with how great disadvantage does he sequester to the affairs of religion, whose mind is stuffed with the remembrance of the past day's business, and the projects to be executed the next? It is to be feared, that his heart is removed far from him, while he is honoring him with his lips; and of all such God says, that in vain do they worship him. Is that man in a fit posture to die, who is out of frame to pray? and can any thing excuse thy being out of tune, Christian, to the one thing needful? thy being indisposed for what is, and should be the main concern of life? When Christ

recommends to you a watching for his coming, he must certainly caution you against these incumbrances, which so directly unfit you for it.

(2.) By their unlawful love of lawful things, have good men been in danger of unreadiness for Christ's coming. They may have learned to abridge their desires, to pity the restless ambition, or insatiable avarice, too visible in other men's conduct, and the same time be themselves in bondage to the creature. While they have seen no happiness in the part which the worldling acts in life, they have felt a pleasure which has been excessive in the review of their own circumstances; and a man may be an idolater, who professes very little of the world. As this has been explained in the apostolical writings, we find that the charge of idolatry may be brought against us, whenever the little we enjoy has too large a place in our hearts, or our hopes of happiness from it are beyond what we ought to encourage from broken and empty cisterns. This is the love to the world, and the things of the world which the Scriptures condemn; and if it were not that we are prone to such extravagance in our regards for these things, and that such a misplacing of our affections drew along with it a variety of inconveniences, we should not be warned against the very same thing so frequently as we are, especially in the New Testament. We need help from heaven to love what God allows us to love, within the proper limits by which he has bounded our respect to all sublunary good. Not to transgress

the measure which is lawful, or appropriate to ourselves what should be sacred to God alone.

We should beware of this, as we would guard against what will contribute to our unreadiness for our Lord's coming. This will do it,

1. By obstructing the exercise of our faith. When this is our governing principle, it scatters the mists which intercept our views of heaven; representing eternal things not as real only, but near. It brings within our sight death as well as immortality, as the *Jordan* through which we are to pass, to the "land flowing with milk and honey." it at once keeps alive the thought of dying, and divests it of its terror; *aye, out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong, sweetness.* Thus it is a preservative against sin, and provokes to universal duty, making our lives a constant, practical, entertaining intimacy with the grave. Now, must not such be ready for Christ's coming, who thus *pass the time of their sojourning here in his fear?*

*Setting our affections on things below*, shows that we are but little influenced by that faith, which is evidence ( $\xi\lambda\epsilon\gamma\chi^{\circ\varsigma}$ , the demonstration) of invisible objects; and as far as it prevails, will hinder the actings and exercise of that grace in the soul. The loading ourselves with *thick clay*, must unfit us for mounting as with eagles' wings towards heaven. If answerable to our unacquaintedness with death, is our want of actual preparation for dying, and an undue regard for lawful things thus indisposes the mind, by putting it from under the influence of

that faith, which should be our governing principle; sure this is to be avoided, as we hope to be found ready.

2. As our faith is hurt hereby, and so our readiness for Christ's coming obstructed; we are further hindered by the excess of our love even to lawful things, as we lose hereby a relish and love for what are most important. Our love to God, and divine objects, when it prevails, has a constraining power. We choose to converse with the things which we superlatively love; and as these are uppermost in our thoughts, life or practice, will be under an answerable influence. We shall love to think of death as the gate of life; dwell upon the subject, as this is a necessary preliminary to our enjoying what is most dear to us. Now, the more our love is prostituted to temporal things, we shall find that it is more sparingly exercised upon eternal ones. Consequently we shall think less frequently of these things, and this will discover itself in a proportioned conversation. Shall we not then guard against this idolatry, not merely from a consciousness of its abstracted guilt, but the consequences which attend it.

As our avoiding what would unfit us for a comfortable meeting with Christ, is one thing referred to in our watching for his coming; so it supposes,

(2.) That we exercise ourselves to whatever may forward our preparedness to meet him. Our Lord supposes this duty to be of a positive nature, when

to the church of Sardis he says, *Remember how thou hast received, and heard, and hold fast, and repent; if thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee: Rev. iii. 3. And ch. xvi. 15, of the same book, he says, Behold I come as a thief, blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments.* This must be intended, when he bids us watch and pray that we enter not into temptation. Our duty cannot be discharged by mere negatives; it is not enough that we do not sleep as do others, when our being employed through our whole lives, in such exercises as may make us, and keep us ready to die, is what God the Lord requires. Not that we are to be continually poring on the grave, or as if we failed in our duty, whenever we were from under an actual sense of our mortality. We shall acquit ourselves, so as to be accepted of Christ, if the following description does agree to our general conduct of life.

1. If heaven be a place with which we maintain a constant correspondence. When the apostle says in the names of all real Christians, our conversation is in heaven, we should take heed that we do not mistake him. He does not make it inconsistent with true piety, that this conversation should be at any time interrupted; and our thoughts, and cares, and labours, return to earth, and earthly things. He would then speak of what no mere creature did ever attain to, instead of his assertions

being univervally true. Nor would this be our duty, though possible, considering our present circumstances ; who have frail, crazy, needy bodies, that claim a proper share in our regard ; though we owe them an inferior one, to that which is due to our spiritual and immortal part. He means, that as the Christian's general walk is agreeable to his professed expectation of heaven , so hither he retires for his chief joys, when free from what disturbed and interrupted such converse ; that he is as little a stranger there as possible. He who keeps up such a correspondence, is inured to the thought of dying, and properly said to watch for Christ's coming, as he lives in that heaven which is chiefly dear to him, for Christ's sake.

2. If, while in this world, we are learning to leave it, we practice the duty which my text recommends. No wonder if their faces gather paleness, and sorrow fills their hearts, to whose minds death has scarce ever been present, till they see him coming to execute the sentence of a broken law. Good men have found it of ill consequence, that they have made death no more familiar to them, who the more he is a stranger, will appear the more terrible. They have upon this account felt fresh agonies in dying; and taking them from this world, has been like tearing the caul of their hearts in sunder. He who makes it his daily business to sit loose from present things, rejoicing and weep-

ing, as though he neither wept nor rejoiced ; who respects them only as conveniencies in his way, no part of the happiness to which he aspired ; that realizes to his own mind the necessity of dying, the nature of that hard work, and lives in perfect friendship with the grave ; that man properly watches for Christ's coming, and cannot be unready at his call.

3. If we see each day of our lives to keep all accounts clear, and balanced between God and us, we shall be approved as having discharged this duty. He who lets matters run on unsettled, shows that he is not apprehensive of his being speedily called to a reckoning ; and he who dares not venture to allow the arrears of one day to be unadjusted, tells God and the world, that he looks every night when his soul shall be required at his hands. The meeting will be terrible when death overtakes us unlooked for, and tells us that we have not a day to live, though the business of an whole life to do. This makes his visage ghastly, his stroke heavy, puts poison into his sting, turns the last into a fiery trial. But he who has studied the knowledge of himself, whose repentance has kept pace with the discoveries of his sin, who has made a fresh choice of God daily, and a fresh dedication of himself to his service, (as every day's sins are a virtual departure from him, and renunciation of his propriety in us) and a fresh application of the *blood*.

*of sprinkling*; as this person can never be called unready, so he gives abundant evidence of his watching for the coming of Christ.

This is all I shall offer upon the first head, for explaining the duty of watchfulness, as it is recommended in the text. It supposes our avoiding whatever either as amusement or incumbrance might make us less ready; and the exercising ourselves to whatever may forward our preparedness to meet Christ at his coming.

II. I am now to show you the force of the reasoning, when this duty is urged from the consideration of the "Son of man's coming in a day, and at an hour that we know not." This duty is frequently pressed by the very same motive. The thought is the same, when Christ, says, *ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning, therefore watch*; Mark xiii. 35. And when, as in the just mentioned Rev. iii. he enforces it, from his coming as a thief.

I take the substance of the argument to be summed up in these particulars: your unwatchfulness cannot prevent my coming; it will rob you of their comfort, whom I shall find ready; and make it a terrible coming to you.

In his recommending this duty, we must suppose our Lord to say,

1. Your unwatchfulness cannot prevent my coming; it is therefore wise in you to expect it. All your times are in my hands, your removal out of

life depends not upon your choice, but my pleasure. Since unthoughtfulness of death is no security against it, how unreasonable your disobedience to this particular command? Remember that I came, and "took those away, who were eating, and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage," in the old world: made quick work with them, sweeping the whole human race into eternity by a preternatural deluge, one family excepted; therefore watch. You see from that awful instance, to which I refer you, that you are not the more safe by forgetting your danger. Never were they less apprehensive of death, than when their destruction came upon them.

To carry the thread of the argument, it is further to be considered,

2. Though your unwatchfulness cannot prevent my coming, yet it will deprive you of their comfort of those whom I shall find ready. "Who is the faithful and wise servant (says Christ) whom his Lord has made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, he shall make him ruler over all his goods;" Mat. xxiv. 45, 46, 47. My coming will make such persons amends, who regularly expect it; and since unwatchfulness defends not from death, and yet makes a forfeiture of so comprehensive a blessing, whether is greater, the folly or the wickedness of this conduct? If you

would go with me to the marriage, let me find you ready. Come I shall, and I will do such, very particular favors, who love mine appearing: think therefore, whether it be not motive sufficient to continued watchfulness, when so much is hazarded by a contrary behaviour?

To complete the argument, we may suppose our Lord to say,

3. When I come, be it sooner or later, if you are not upon the watch; it will be a terrible coming to you. Somewhat of this sort is referred to, when Christ says, *Watch ye therefore, lest coming suddenly, I find you sleeping*; Mark xiii. 35, 36. There is a threatening of woe to the unwatchful, wrapt up in those expressions. And if you look to the twenty fourth chapter of Matthew, from the forty eighth verse, you will find there a very explicit declaration of the vengeance which shall overtake them: "The Lord of the evil servant will come when he is not aware of it, and cut him asunder, appointing him the hypocrite's portion."

Upon the whole, the matter is set in this light, though I tell you not when I shall come, on what day, or in what hour, yet I have given assurance to all, that I will come; I urge your watching for that time, whenever it shall be, from the consideration of the good you shall lose, and the evil you shall suffer, if otherwise employed at my coming.

III. I shall now endeavor to vindicate the divine conduct in this disposal of things.

Should it be said, that by keeping us in the dark as to this matter, we are deprived of the most proper *motive* to duty; and that in order to our being in a constant readiness for such an event, it would have been better if every person exactly knew the period of his life, and when he should be called into judgment: I shall reply to this objection in the following particulars.

1. God can do nothing but what is best, therefore his having put our affairs upon another footing, concludes that his work is not to be mended, or the designs he has in view more effectually attained in another way. The rich man in the gospel told Abraham, that God took the less proper method for reducing the world to his obedience, that a messenger from the invisible state would do much more by his testimony for the conviction of mankind, than could be expected from the ordinance of preaching; but Abraham assured him, that the creature was very unfit to correct the conduct of his maker, in saying, *if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead*: Luke xvi. ult.

2. Obvious inconveniencies would attend our having such a knowledge of the time of our death and Judgment. It is not improbable that it might prove a dangerous temptation to a good man; slacken his pace, and abate his diligence, to see a large space between him and death. And on the other hand, that his beholding himself upon the

very brink of eternity, might so swallow up his time, and thoughts, and cares, as that his personal should break in upon the relative and social duties, which are bound upon conscience, by the same authority.

And as to a wicked man, as his heart would be more fully set in him to do wickedly, when he saw that sentence against his evil deeds was not to be executed speedily; the seeing himself within the shadow of death would make him desperate: and so his circumstances be worse than now they are, whether his time were longer or shorter in the world.

3. Taking our case as it now stands, we have the most rational motive to continued watchfulness. There is no room for a moment's intermission of this duty for security or slumber, because we know not but our fast sands may be running, and after a few pulses more, the silver cord shall be broken. And our not knowing but that we may have years to come, secures us against that troublesome concern, that might imbitter our short stay, did we see them waiting at the door, who should carry us to the grave. So that there seems to be a mixture of divine wisdom and goodness in the thing, when Christ commands us to watch, because we know not either the day or hour of his coming.

The whole of this discourse has been practical, which makes it less needful to enlarge in the application.

However, we will offer something under this IVth and last head of discourse. We cannot but observe from what has been said,

1. The wisdom of being truly religious. Such are provided against all events: nothing can befall them which shall not work together for their good. The watchfulness of which we have spoken, is not to be considered as a single duty, but as of a complex nature; taking into it Christianity itself, in all the beauty and perfection it can appear, in our present state. And are not they wise in a way of distinction and eminence, who being intended for another world, into which they are certainly, and they know not how suddenly to be removed, have laid in for whatever can happen to them? "To whom to live, is Christ; and to die, gain? So that whether they live, they live unto the Lord; or whether they die, they die unto the Lord: whether therefore they live or die, they are the Lord's." This is not indeed *the wisdom of this world*; they are now too far prejudiced to give into it, but it is what God applauds as wisdom, and what (another day) the vilest of men shall acknowledge to be so.

2. See hence the folly and danger of security, when *we know not what a day may bring forth*. O say not, worldling, when such a scheme is executed, and I have surmounted this and the other incumbrance, I will take care of my poor soul; and I will then begin to study and practice religion. Thy soul is worth more than the whole world;

and you are not sure, though now in the pride of life, but that you may be numbered among the dead before tomorrow: and in that day will all these good thoughts and purposes perish. You th health, strength, protect not against the assaults of the grave. But few *hoary heads* come there, but few worn out with years and infirmities, in comparison with such as die in their full strength. As you would not be lost to eternity, do not trifle away your present, short, uncertain time.

Let this thought keep you wakeful, Christian. Endeavour to live under this awful sound, *Arise, ye dead and come to Judgment*. Carry about with you the thoughts of death and eternity, wherever you are, and whatever you do.

Among others, these two very good effects will follow this.

1. It will make your light to shine. You cannot be vain, frothy, proud, censorious, worldly, while your spirits are under the command of such thoughts. No, you will be serious, humble, spiritual, heavenly, as these are in you, and abound. And while you are glorifying your Father in heaven, you are promoting your own, your best interest. For,

2. Your latter end will be better than your beginning. The day of your death, better than the day in which they said, there is a man-child born. When you are called to die, you will step out of this world into heaven. You cannot be more ready

to meet Christ, than you will find him ready to receive you. And O happy souls, that leave weeping friends, for the embraces of the God of love; the great God, your Saviour. You will find, when he carries you to your father's house, that all your watchings, prayers, tears, labors of love, your afflictions, trials, troubles, for the name and sake of this Saviour, *are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in you.*

THE END,











